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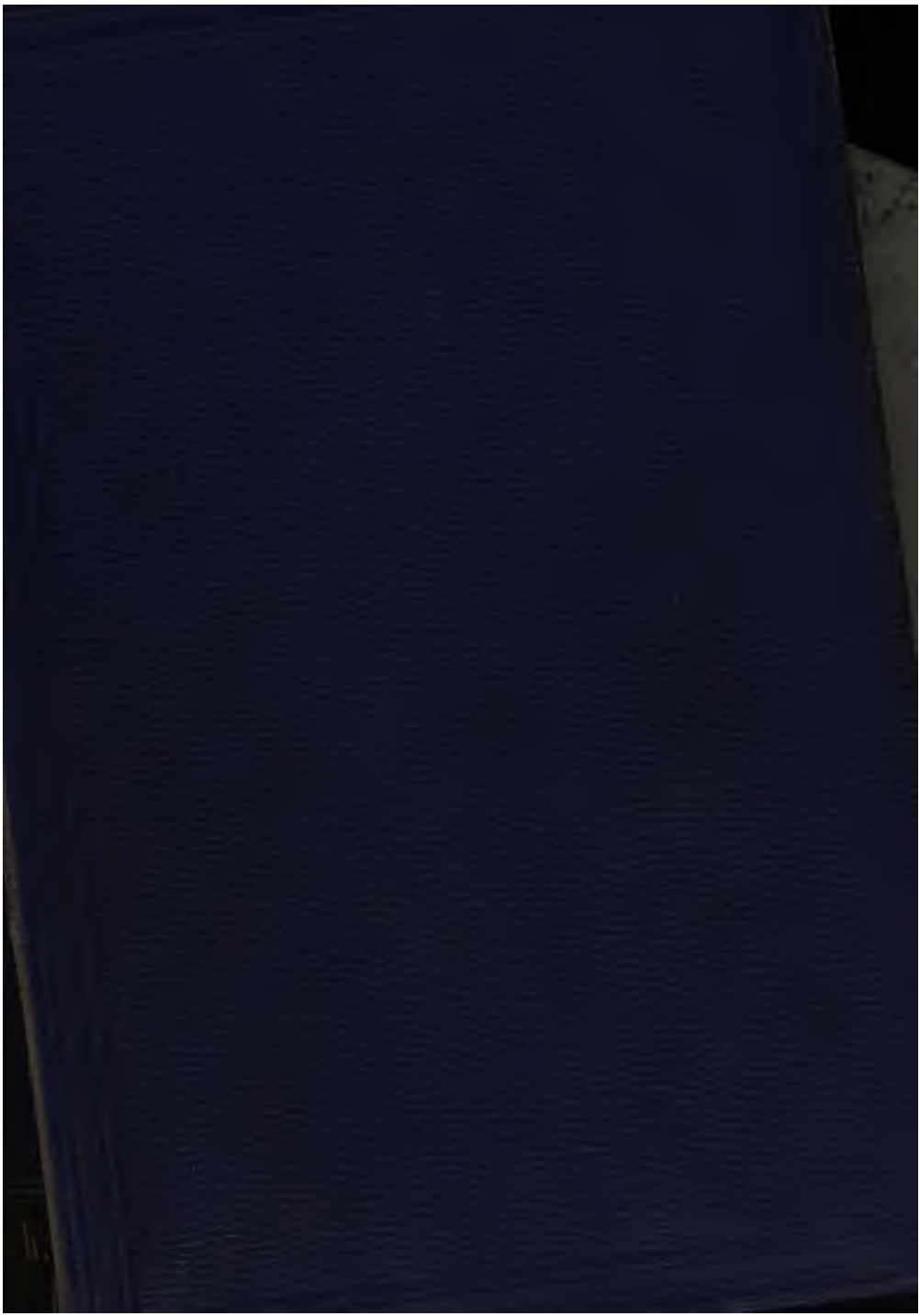

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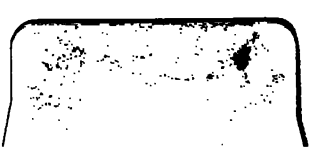

RAVENSHOE.

VOL. III.

RAVENSHOE.

BY HENRY KINGSLEY,

AUTHOR OF "GEOFFRY HAMLYN."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CONTENTS.

VOL. III.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

SHREDS AND PATCHES 1

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH CHARLES COMES TO LIFE AGAIN 22

CHAPTER III.

WHAT LORD SALTIRE AND FATHER MACKWORTH SAID WHEN THEY LOOKED OUT OF THE WINDOW 38

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN ARCHER TURNS UP 55

CHAPTER V.

PAGE
CHARLES MEETS HORNBY AT LAST 68

CHAPTER VI.

ARCHER'S PROPOSAL 86

CHAPTER VII.

SCUTARI 108

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT CHARLES DID WITH HIS LAST EIGHTEEN SHILLINGS . . . 117

CHAPTER IX.

THE NORTH SIDE OF GROSVENOR SQUARE 128

CHAPTER X.

LORD ASCOT'S CROWNING ACT OF FOLLY 150

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRIDGE AT LAST 169

CHAPTER XII.

SAVED 189

CHAPTER XIII.

PAGE
MR. JACKSON'S BIG TROUT 197

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH GUS CUTS FLORA'S DOLL'S CORNS 209

CHAPTER XV.

THE ALLIED ARMIES ADVANCE ON RAVENSHOE 215

CHAPTER XVI.

FATHER MACKWORTH PUTS THE FINISHING TOUCH ON HIS GREAT PIECE OF EMBROIDERY 222

CHAPTER XVII.

GUS AND FLORA ARE NAUGHTY IN CHURCH, AND THE WHOLE BUSINESS COMES TO AN END. 244

RAVENSHOE.

CHAPTER I.

SHREDS AND PATCHES.

LORD WELTER was now Lord Ascot. I was thinking at one time that I would continue to call him by his old title, as being the one most familiar to you. But, on second thoughts, I prefer to call him by his real name, as I see plainly that to follow the other course would produce still worse confusion. I only ask that you will bear his change of title in mind. The new Lady Ascot I shall continue to call Adelaide, choosing rather to incur the charge of undue familiarity with people so far above me in social position, than to be answerable for the inevitable confusion which would be caused by my speaking, so often as I shall have to speak, of two Ladies Ascot, with such a vast difference between them of age and character.

Colonel Whisker, a tenant of Lord Ascot's, had kindly

placed his house at the disposal of his Lordship for his father's funeral. Never was there a more opportune act of civility, for Ranford was dismantled: and the doors of Casterton were as firmly closed to Adelaide as the gates of the great mosque at Ispahan to a Christian.

Two or three days after Lord Ascot's death, it was arranged that he should be buried at Ranford. That night the new Lord Ascot came to his wife's dressing-room, as usual, to plot and conspire.

"Ascot," said she, "they are all asked to Casterton for the funeral. Do you think she will ask me?"

"Oh dear, no," said Lord Ascot.

"Why not?" said Adelaide. "She ought to. She is civil enough to me."

"I tell you I know she won't. He and I were speaking about it to-day."

He was looking over her shoulder into the glass, and saw her bite her lip.

"Ah," said she. "And what did he say?"

"Oh, he came up in his infernal, cold, insolent way, and said that he should be delighted to see me at Casterton during the funeral, but Lady Hainault feared that she could hardly find rooms for Lady Ascot and her maid."

"Did you knock him down? Did you kick him?

Did you take him by the throat and knock his hateful head against the wall?" said Adelaide, as quietly as if she was saying "How d'ye do?"

"No, my dear, I didn't," said Lord Ascot. "Partly, you see, because I did not know how Lord Saltire would take it. And remember, Adelaide, I always told you that it would take years, years, before people of that sort would receive you."

"What did you say to him?"

"Well, as much as you could expect me to say. I sneered as insolently, but much more coarsely than he could possibly sneer; and I said that I declined staying at any house where my wife was not received. And so we bowed and parted."

Adelaide turned round and said, "That was kind and manly of you, Welter. I thank you for that, Welter."

And so they went down to Colonel Whisker's cottage, for the funeral. The Colonel probably knew quite how the land lay, for he was a man of the world, and so he had done a very good-natured action just at the right time. She and Lord Ascot lived for a fortnight there, in the most charming style; and Adelaide used to make him laugh, by describing what it was possible the other party were doing up at solemn old Casterton. She used to put her nose in the air and

imitate young Lady Hainault to perfection. At another time she would imitate old Lady Hainault and her disagreeable sayings equally well. She was very amusing that fortnight, though never affectionate. She knew that was useless; but she tried to keep Lord Ascot in good humour with her. She had a reason. She wanted to get his ear. She wanted him to confide entirely to her the exact state of affairs between Lord Saltire and himself. Here was Lord Ascot dead, Charles Ravenshoe probably at Alyden in the middle of the cholera, and Lord Saltire's vast fortune, so to speak, going a-begging. If he were to be clumsy now —now that the link formed by his father, Lord Ascot, between him and Lord Saltire was taken away—they were ruined indeed. And he was so terribly outspoken!

And so she strained her wits till her face grew sharp and thin, to keep him in good humour. She had a hard task at times; for there was something laying up in the deserted house at Ranford which made Lord Ascot gloomy and savage now and then, when he thought of it. I believe that the man, coarse and brutal as he was, loved his father, in his own way, very deeply.

A night or so after the funeral, there was a dressing-room conference between the two; and, as the con-

versation which ensued was very important, I must transcribe it carefully.

When he came up to her, she was sitting with her hands folded on her lap, looking so perfectly beautiful that Lord Ascot, astonished and anxious as he was at that moment, remarked it, and felt pleased at, and proud of, her beauty. A greater fool than she might probably have met him with a look of love. She did not. She only raised her great eyes to his, with a look of intelligent curiosity.

He drew a chair up close to her and said—

"I am going to make your hair stand bolt up on end, Adelaide, in spite of your bandoline."

"I don't think so," said she; but she looked startled, nevertheless.

"I am. What do you think of this?"

"This? I think that it is the *Times* newspaper. Is there anything in it?"

"Read," said he, and pointed to the list of deaths. She read.

"Drowned, while bathing in Ravenshoe Bay, Cuthbert Ravenshoe, Esq., of Ravenshoe Hall. In the faith that his forefathers bled and died for.—R.I.P."

"Poor fellow!" she said quietly. "So *he's* gone, and brother William, the groom, reigns in his stead. That is a piece of nonsense of the priests about their dying

for the faith. I never heard that any of them did that. Also, isn't there something wrong about the grammar?"

"I can't say," said Lord Ascot. I was at Eton, and hadn't the advantage that you had of learning English grammar. Did you ever play the game of trying to read the *Times* right across, from one column to another, and see what funny nonsense it makes?"

"No. I should think it was good fun."

"Do it now."

She did. Exactly opposite the announcement of Cuthbert's death, was the advertisement we have seen before—Lord Saltire's advertisement for the missing register.

She was attentive and eager enough now. After a time, she said, "Oho!"

Lord Ascot said, "Hey! what do you think of that, Lady Ascot?"

"I am all abroad."

"I'll see if I can fetch you home again. Petre Ravenshoe, in 1778, married a milkmaid. She remembered the duties of her position so far as to conveniently die before any of the family knew what a fool he had made of himself; but so far forgot them, as to give birth to a boy, who lived to be one of the best shots, and one of the jolliest old cocks I ever saw—Old James, the Ravenshoe keeper. Now my

dearly beloved grandmother Ascot is, at this present speaking, no less than eighty-six years old, and so, at the time of the occurrence, was a remarkably shrewd girl of ten. It appears that Peter Ravenshoe, sneaking away here and there with his pretty Protestant wife, out of the way of the priests, and finding life unendurable, not having had a single chance to confess his sins for two long years, came to the good-natured Sir Cingle Headstall, grandmamma's papa, and opened his griefs, trying to persuade him to break the matter to that fox-hunting old Turk of a father of his, Howard. Sir Cingle was too cowardly to face the old man for a time; and, before the pair of them could summon courage to speak, the poor young thing died at Manger Hall, where they had been staying with the Headstalls some months. This solved the difficulty, and nothing was said about the matter. Petre went home. They had heard reports about his living with a woman and having had a baby born. They asked very few questions about the child or his mother, and of course it was all forgotten conveniently, long before his marriage with my grandaunt, Lady Alicia Staunton, came on the tapis, which took place in 1782, when grandma was fourteen years of age. Now grandma had, as a girl of ten, heard this marriage of Petre Ravenshoe with Maria Dawson discussed in her

presence, from every point of view, by her father and Petre. Night and morning, at bed-time, at meal-times, sober, and very frequently drunk. She had heard every possible particular. When she heard of his second marriage (my mouth is as dry as dust with this talking; ring the bell, and send your maid down for some claret and water)—when she heard of his second marriage, she never dreamt of saying anything, of course—a chit of fourteen with a great liability to having her ears boxed. So she held her tongue. When afterwards my grandfather made love to her, she held it the tighter, for my grandaunt's sake, of whom she was fond. Petre, after a time, had the boy James home to Ravenshoe, and kept him about his own person. He made him his gamekeeper, treated him with marked favour and so on; but the whole thing was a sort of misprision of felony, and poor silly old grandma was a party to it."

"You are telling this very well, Ascot," said Adelaide. "I will, as a reward, go so far out of my usual habits as to mix you some claret and water. I am not going to be tender, you know; but I'll do so much. Now that's a dear, good fellow; go on."

"Now comes something unimportant, but inexplicable. Old Lady Hainault knew it, and held *her* tongue. How or why is a mystery we cannot fathom, and don't

want to. Grandma says that she would have married Petre herself, and that her hatred for grandma came from the belief that grandma could have stopped the marriage with my grandaunt by speaking. After it was over, she thinks that Lady Hainault had sufficient love left for Petre to hold her tongue. But this is nothing to the purpose. This James, the real heir of Ravenshoe, married an English girl, a daughter of a steward on one of our Irish estates, who had been born in Ireland and was called Norah. She was, you see, Irish enough at heart; for she committed the bull of changing her own child, poor dear Charles, the real heir, for his youngest half-brother, William, by way of bettering his position, and then confessed the whole matter to the priest. Now this new discovery would blow the hónest priest's boat out of the water; but:—"

"Yes!"

"Why, grandma can't, for the life of her, remember where they were married. She is certain that it was in the north of Hampshire, she says. Why or wherefore, she can't say. She says they resided the necessary time and were married by licence. She says she is sure of it, because she heard him, more than once, say to her father that he had been so careful of poor Maria's honour, that he sent her from Ravenshoe to the house of the clergyman who married them,

who was a friend of his; farther than this she knows nothing."

"Hence the advertisement, then. But why was it not inserted before?"

"Why, it appears that, when the whole *esclandre* took place, and when you, my Lady Ascot, jilted the poor fellow for a man who is not worth his little finger, she communicated with Lord Saltire at once, and the result was that she began advertising in so mysterious a manner that the advertisement was wholly unintelligible. It appears that she and Lord Saltire agreed not to disturb Cuthbert till they were perfectly sure of everything. But, now he is dead, Lord Saltire has insisted on instantly advertising in a sensible way. So you see his advertisement appears actually in the same paper which contains Cuthbert's death, the news of which William got the night before last by telegraph."

"William, eh? How does he like the cup being dashed from his lips like this?"

Lord Ascot laughed. "That ex-groom is a born fool, Lady Ascot. He loves his foster-brother better than nine thousand a year, Lady Ascot. He is going to start to Varna, and hunt him through the army and bring him back."

"It is incredible," said Adelaide.

"I don't know. I might have been such a fool myself once, who knows?"

"Who knows indeed," thought Adelaide, "who knows now?" "So," she said aloud, "Charles is heir of Ravenshoe after all."

"Yes. You were foolish to jilt him."

"I was. Is Alyden healthy?"

"You know it is not. Our fellows are dying like dogs."

"Do they know what regiment he is in?"

"They think, from Lady Hainault's and Mary Corby's description, that it is the 140th."

"Why did not William start on this expedition before?"

"I don't know. A new impulse. They have written to all sorts of commanding officers, but he won't turn up till he chooses, if I know him right."

"If William brings him back?"

"Why, then he'll come into nine, or more probably twelve thousand a year. For those tin lodes have turned up trumps."

"And the whole of Lord Saltire's property?"

"I suppose so."

"And we remain beggars?"

"I suppose so," said Lord Ascot. "It is time to go to bed, Lady Ascot."

This is exactly the proper place to give the results of William's expedition to Varna. He arrived there just after the army had gone forward. Some men were left behind invalided, among whom were two or three of the 140th. One of these William selected as being a likely man from whom to make inquiries.

He was a young man, and, likely enough, a kind-hearted one; but when he found himself inquired of by a handsome, well-dressed young gentleman, obviously in search of a missing relative, a lying spirit entered into him, and he lied horribly. It appeared that he had been the intimate and cherished comrade of Charles Horton (of whom he had never heard in his life). That they had ridden together, drunk together, and slept side by side. That he had nursed him through the cholera, and then (seeing no other way out of the maze of falsehood in which he had entangled himself), that he assisted to bury him with his own hands. Lastly, lying on through mere recklessness, into desperation, and so into a kind of sublimity, he led William out of the town, and pointed out to him Charles's untimely grave. When he saw William pick some dry grass from the grave, when he saw him down on his knees, with his cheek on the earth, then he was sorry for what he had done. And, when he was alone, and saw William's shadow pass across the blazing white wall, for one

instant, before he went under the dark gateway of the town, then the chinking gold pieces fell from his hand on the burning sandy ground, and he felt that he would have given them and ten times more, to have spoken the truth.

So Charles was dead and buried was he? Not quite yet, if you please. Who is this riding, one of a gallant train, along the shores of the bay of Eupatoria towards some dim blue mountains? Who is this that keeps looking each minute to the right, at the noble fleet which is keeping pace with the great scarlet and blue rainbow which men call the allied armies? At the great cloud of smoke floating angrily seaward, and the calm waters of the bay beaten into madness by three hundred throbbing propellers?

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH CHARLES COMES TO LIFE AGAIN.

HA! This was a life again. Better this than dawdling about at the heels of a dandy, or sitting on a wheelbarrow in a mews! There is a scent here sweeter than that of the dung-hill, or the dandy's essences—what is it? The smell of tar, and bilge water, and red herrings. There is a fresh whiff of air up this narrow street, which moves your hair, and makes your pulse quicken. It is the free wind of the sea. At the end of the street are ships, from which comes the clinking of cranes; pleasanter music sometimes than the song of nightingales.

Down the narrow street towards the wharf come the hussars. Charles is among them. On the wharf, in the confusion, foremost, as far as he dare, to assist. He was known as the best horseman in the troop, and, as such, was put into dangerous places. He had attracted great attention among the officers by his fearlessness and dexterity. The captain had openly praised him; and,

when the last horse had been slung in, and the last cheer given, and the great ship was away down the river, on her message of wrath, and woe, and glory, Charles was looking back at Southampton spires, a new man with a new career before him.

The few months of degradation, of brooding misery, of listlessness and helplessness he had gone through, made this short episode in his life appear the most happy and most beautiful of all. The merest clod of a recruit in the regiment felt in some way ennobled and exalted; but as for Charles, with his intensely sensitive, romantic nature, he was quite, as the French say, *tête montée*. The lowest menial drudgery was exalted and glorified. Groom his horse and help clean the deck? Why not? That horse must carry him in the day of the merry meeting of heroes. Hard living, hard work, bad weather, disease, death: what were they, with his youth, health, strength, and nerve? Not to be thought of save with a smile. Yes! this expedition of his to the Crimea was the noblest, and possibly the happiest in his life. To use a borrowed simile, it was like the mournful, beautiful autumn sunset, before the dark night closes in. He felt like a boy at midsummer, exploring some wood, or distant valley, watched from a distance long, and at last attained; or as one feels when a stranger in a new

land, one first rides forth alone into the forest on some distant expedition, and sees the new world, dreamt of and longed for all one's life, realized in all its beauty and wonder at last; and expanding leaf by leaf before one. In a romantic state of mind. I can express it no better.

And really it is no wonder that a man, not sea-sick, should have been in a state of wonder, eager curiosity, kindliness, and, above all, high excitement—which four states of mind, I take it, make up together the state of mind called romantic, quixotic, or chivalrous; which is a very pleasant state of mind indeed. For curiosity, there was enough to make the dullest man curious. Where were they going? Where would the blow be struck? Where would the dogs of war first fix their teeth? Would it be a campaign in the field, or a siege, or what? For kindliness: were not his comrades a good set of brave, free-hearted lads, and was not he the favourite among them? As for wonder and excitement, there was plenty of that, and it promised to last. Why, the ship herself was a wonder. The biggest in the world, carrying 500 men and horses; and every man in the ship knew, before she had been five hours at sea, that that quiet-looking commander of hers was going to race her out under steam the whole way. Who could tire of wondering at the glimpse one got down the iron-

railed well into the machinery, at the busy cranks and leaping pistons, or, when tired of that, at the strange dim vista of swinging horses between decks? Wonder and excitement enough here to keep twenty Don Quixotes going! Her very name too was romantic —HIMALAYA.

A north-east wind and a mountain of rustling white canvas over head. Blue water that seethed and creamed, and roared past to leeward. A calm, and the Lizard to the north, a dim grey cape. A south-west wind, and above a mighty cobweb of sail-less rigging. Top-gallant masts sent down and yards close hauled. Still, through it all, the busy clack and rattle of the untiring engine.

A dim wild sunset, and scudding prophet clouds that hurried from the west across the crimson zenith, like witches towards a sabbath. A wind that rose and grew as the sun went down, and hummed loud in the rigging as the bows of the ship dipped into the trough of the waves, and failed almost into silence as she raised them. A night of storm and terror; in the morning, the tumbling broken seas of Biscay. A few fruit brigs scudding wildly here and there; and a cape on a new land. A high round down, showing a gleam of green among the flying mists.

Sail set again before a northerly wind, and the ship rolling before it like a jolly drunkard. Then a dim

cloud of smoke before them. Then the great steamer *Bussorah*, thundering forward against the wind, tearing furiously at the leaping seas with her iron teeth. A hurried glimpse of fluttering signals, and bare wet empty decks; and, before you had time to say what a noble ship she was, and what good weather she was making of it, only a cloud of smoke miles astern.

Now a dark line, too faint for landsmen's eyes, far ahead, which changed into a loom of land, which changed into a cloud, which changed into a dim peak towering above the sea mists, which changed into a tall crag, with a town, and endless tiers of white fortification—Gibraltar.

Then a strong west wind for three days, carrying the ship flying before it with all plain sail set. And each day, at noon, a great excitement on the quarter-deck, among the officers. On the third day much cheering and laughter, and shaking of hands with the commander. Charles, catching an opportunity, took leave to ask his little friend the cornet, what it meant. The Himalaya had run a thousand miles in sixty-three hours.[1]

And now at sunrise an island is in sight, flat, bald, blazing yellow in the morning sun, with a solitary flat-

[1] The most famous voyage of the *Himalaya*, from Cork to Varna in twelve days, with the Fifth Dragoon Guards, took place in June. The voyage here described is, as will be perceived, a subsequent one, but equally successful, apparently.

topped mass of buildings just in the centre, which the sailors say is Civita Vecchia; and, as they sweep round the southern point of it, a smooth bay opens, and there is a flat-roofed town rising in tiers from the green water —above heavier fortifications than those of Gibraltar, Charles thinks, but wrongly. Right and left, two great forts, St. Elmo and St. Angelo, say the sailors, and that flight of stone steps, winding up into the town, is the Nix Mangare stairs. A flood of historical recollections comes over Charles, and he recognises the place as one long known and very dear to him. On those very stairs, Mr. Midshipman Easy stood, and resolved that he would take a boat and sail to Gozo. What followed on his resolution is a matter of history. Other events have taken place at Malta, about which Charles was as well informed as the majority, but Charles did not think of them; not even of St. Paul and the viper, or the old windy dispute, in Greek Testament lecture, at Oxford, between this Melita and the other one off the coast of Illyricum. He thought of Midshipman Easy, and felt as if he had seen the place before.

I suppose that, if I knew my business properly, I should at this point represent Charles as falling down the companion-ladder and spraining his ancle, or as having over-eaten himself, or something of that sort, and so pass over the rest of the voyage by saying that he

was confined to his bunk, and saw no more of it. But I am going to do nothing of the sort, for two reasons. In the first place, because he did not do anything of the kind; and in the next, because he saw somebody at Constantinople, of whom I am sure you will be glad to hear again.

Charles had seen Tenedos golden in the east, and Lemnos purple in the west, as the sun went down; then, after having steamed at half-speed through the Dardanelles, was looking the next evening at Constantinople, and at the sun going down behind the minarets, and at all that sort of thing, which is no doubt very beautiful, but of which one seems to have heard once or twice before. The ship was lying at anchor, with fires banked, and it was understood that they were waiting for a Queen's messenger.

They could see their own boat, which they had sent to wait for him at Seraglio Point. One of the sailors had lent Charles a telescope—a regular old brute of a telescope, with a crack across the object-glass. Charles was looking at the boat with it, and suddenly said, "There he is."

He saw a small grey-headed man, with moustaches, come quickly down and get into the boat, followed by some Turks with his luggage. This was Colonel Oldhoss, the Queen's messenger; but there was another

man with him, whom Charles recognised at once. He handed the telescope to the man next him, and walked up and down the deck rapidly.

"I *should* like to speak to him," he thought, "if it were only one word. Dear old fellow. But then he will betray me, and they will begin persecuting me at home, dear souls. I suppose I had better not. No. If I am wounded and dying I will send for him. I will not speak to him now."

The Queen's messenger and his companion came on board, and the ship got under way and steamed through the Bosporus out into the wild seething waves of the "Fena Kara degniz," and Charles turned in without having come near either of them. But in the chill morning, when the ship's head was north-west, and the dawn was flushing up on the distant Thracian sierra, Charles was on deck, and, while pausing for an instant in his duties, to look westward, and try to remember what country and what mountains lay to the north-west of Constantinople, a voice behind him said quietly, "Go find me Captain Croker, my man." He turned and was face to face with General Mainwaring.

It was only for an instant, but their eyes met; the general started, but he did not recognise him. Charles's moustache had altered him so much that it was no great wonder. He was afraid that the general would seek him

out again, but he did not. These were busy times. They were at Varna that night.

Men were looking sourly at one another. The French expedition had just come in from Kustendji in a lamentable state, and the army was rotting in its inactivity. You know all about that as well as I can tell you; what is of more importance to us is, that Lieutenant Hornby had been down with typhus, and was recovering very slowly, so that Charles's chances of meeting him were very small.

What am I to do with this three weeks or more at Varna to which I have reduced Charles, you, and myself? Say as little about it as need be, I should say. Charles and his company were, of course, moved up at once to the cavalry camp at Devna, eighteen miles off, among the pleasant hills and woodlands. Once, his little friend, the young cornet, who had taken a fancy for him, made him come out shooting with him to carry his bag. And they scrambled and clambered, and they tore themselves with thorns, and they fell down steep places, and utterly forgot their social positions towards one another. And they tried to carry home every object which was new to them, including a live turtle and a basaltic column. And they saw a green lizard, who arched his tail and galloped away like a racehorse, and a grey lizard, who let down a bag under his chin and barked

at them like a dog. And the cornet shot a quail, and a hare, and a long-tailed francolin, like a pheasant, and a wood-pigeon. And, lastly, they found out that, if you turned over the stones, there were scorpions under them, who tucked their claws under their armpits, as a man folds his arms, and sparred at them with their tails, drawing their sting in and out, as an experienced boxer moves his left hand when waiting for an attack. Altogether, they had a glorious day in a new country, and did not remember in what relation they were to one anothert ill they topped the hill above Devna by moonlight, and saw the two long lakes, stretching towards the sea, broken here and there into silver ripples by the oars of the commissariat boats. A happy innocent school-boy day—the sort of day which never comes if we prepare for it and anticipate it, but which comes without warning, and is never forgotten.

Another day the cornet had business in Varna, and he managed that Charles should come with him as orderly; and with him, as another orderly, went the young lad who spoke about his sister in the pot-house at Windsor: for this lad was another favourite of the cornet's, being a quiet gentlemanly lad, in fact a favourite with everybody. A very handsome lad, too. And the three went branking bravely down the hill-side, through the woodlands, over the steaming plain, into

the white dirty town. And the cornet must stay and dine with the mess of the 42d, and so Charles and the other lad might go where they would. And they went and bathed, and then, when they had dressed, they stood together under the burning white wall, looking over the wicked Black Sea, smoking. And Charles told his comrade about Ravenshoe, about the deer, and the pheasants, and the blackcock, and about the big trout that lay nosing up into the swift places, in the cool clear water. And suddenly the lad turned on him, with his handsome face livid with agony and horror, and clutched him convulsively by both arms, and prayed him, for God Almighty's sake——

There, that will do. We need not go on. The poor lad was dead in four hours. The cholera was very prevalent at Varna that month, and those who dawdled about in the hot sun, at the mouth of the filthy drains of that accursed hole, found it unto their cost. We were fighting, you see, to preserve the town to those worthless dirty Turks, against the valiant, noble, but, I fear, equally dirty Russians. The provoking part of the Russian war was, that all through we respected and liked our gallant enemies far more than we did the useless rogues for whom we were fighting. Moreover, our good friends the French seem to have been more struck by this absurdity than ourselves.

I only mentioned this sad little incident to show that this Devna life among the pleasant woodlands was not all sunshine; that now and then Charles was reminded, by some tragedy like this, that vast masses of men were being removed from ordinary occupations and duties into an unusual and abnormal mode of life; and that Nature was revenging herself for the violation of her laws.

You see that we have got through this three weeks more pleasantly than they did at Varna. Charles was sorry when the time came for breaking up the camp among the mountain woodlands. The more so, as it had got about among the men that they were only to take Sebastopol by a sudden attack in the rear, and spend the winter there. There would be no work for the cavalry, every one said.

It is just worthy of notice how, when one once begins a vagabond life, one gets attached to a place where one may chance to rest even for a week. When one gets accustomed to a change of locality every day for a long while, a week's pause gives one more familiarity with a place than a month's residence in a strange house would give if one were habitually stationary. This remark is almost a platitude, but just worth writing down. Charles liked Devna, and had got used to it, and parted from it as he would from a home.

This brings us up to the point where, after his death and burial, I have described him as riding along the shore of the Bay of Eupatoria, watching the fleet. The 140th had very little to do. They were on the extreme left; on the seventeenth they thought they were going to have some work, for they saw 150 of the lancers coming in, driving a lot of cattle before them, and about 1,000 Cossacks hanging on their rear. But, when some light dragoons rode leisurely out to support them, the Cossacks rode off, and the 140th were still condemned to inactivity.

Hornby had recovered, and was with the regiment. He had not recognised Charles, of course. Even if he had come face to face with him, it was almost unlikely that he would have recognised him in his moustache. They were not to meet as yet.

In the evening of the nineteenth there was a rumble of artillery over the hill in front of them, which died away in half an hour. Most of the rest of the cavalry were further to the front of the extreme left, and were "at it," so it was understood, with the Cossacks. But the 140th were still idle.

On the morning of the twentieth, Charles and the rest of them, sitting in their saddles, heard the guns booming in front and on the right. It became understood among the men that the fleet was attacking some

batteries. Also, it was whispered that the Russians were going to stand and fight. Charles was sixth man from the right of the rear rank of the third troop. He could see the tails of the horses immediately before him, and could remark that his front-rank man had a great patch of oil on the right shoulder of his uniform. He could also see Hornby in the troop before him.

These guns went moaning on in the distance till half-past one; but still they sat there idle. About that time there was a new sound in the air, close on their right, which made them prick up their ears and look at one another. Even the head of the column could have seen nothing, for they were behind the hill. But all could hear, and guess. We all know that sound well enough now. You hear it now, thank God, on every village green in England when the cricket is over. Crack, crack! Crack, crack! The noise of advancing skirmishers.

And so it grew from the right towards the front, towards the left, till the air was filled with the shrill treble of musketry. Then, as the French skirmished within reach of the artillery, the deep bass roared up, and the men, who dared not whisper before, could shout at one another without rebuke.

Louder again, as our artillery came into range. All the air was tortured with concussion. Charles would

have given ten years of his life to know what was going on on the other side of the hill. But no. There they sat, and he had to look at the back of the man before him; and at this time he came to the conclusion that the patch of grease on his right shoulder was of the same shape as the map of Sweden.

A long weary two hours or more was spent like this. Charles, by looking forward and to the right, between the two right-hand men of the troop before him, could see the ridge of the hill, and see the smoke rising from beyond it, and drifting away to the left before the sea-breeze. He saw an aide-de-camp come over that ridge and dismount beside the captain of Hornby's troop, loosening his girths. They laughed together; then the captain shouted to Hornby, and he laughed and waved his sword over his head. After this, he was reduced to watching the back of the man before him, and studying the map of Sweden. It was becoming evident that the map of North America, if it existed, must be on his left shoulder, under his hussar jacket, and that the Pacific Islands must be round in front, about his left breast, when the word was given to go forward.

They advanced to the top of the hill, and wheeled. Charles, for one instant, had a glimpse of the valley below, seething and roaring like a volcano. Everywhere bright flashes of flame, single, or running along in lines,

or blazing out in volleys. The smoke, driven to the left by the wind, hung across the valley like a curtain. On the opposite hill a ring of smoke and fire, and in front of it a thin scarlet line disappearing. That was all. The next moment they wheeled to the right, and Charles saw only the back of the man before him, and the patch of grease on his shoulder.

But that night was a night of spurs for them. Hard riding for them far into the night. The field of the Alma had been won, and they were ordered forward to harass the Cossacks, who were covering the rear of the Russian army. They never got near them. But ever after, when the battle of the Alma was mentioned before him, Charles at once used to begin thinking of the map of Sweden.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT LORD SALTIRE AND FATHER MACKWORTH SAID WHEN THEY LOOKED OUT OF THE WINDOW.

"AND how do you do, my dear sir?" said Lord Saltire.

"I enjoy the same perfect health as ever, I thank you, my lord," said Father Mackworth. "And allow me to say, that I am glad to see your lordship looking just the same as ever. You may have forgotten that you were the greatest benefactor that I ever had. I have not."

"Nay, nay," said Lord Saltire. "Let bygones be bygones, my dear sir. By-the-by, Mr. Mackworth—Lord Hainault."

"I am delighted to see you at Casterton, Mr. Mackworth," said Lord Hainault. "We are such rabid Protestants here, that the mere presence of a Catholic ecclesiastic of any kind is a source of pleasurable excitement to us. When, however, we get among us a man like you—a man of whose talents we have heard so much, and a man personally endeared to us, through

the love he bore to one of us who is dead, we give him a threefold welcome."

Lord Saltire used, in his *tête-à-têtes* with Lady Ascot, to wish to Gad that Hainault would cure himself of making speeches. He was one of the best fellows in the world, but he would always talk as if he was in the House of Lords. This was very true about Lord Hainault; but, although he might be a little stilted in his speech, he meant every word he said, and was an affectionate, good-hearted man, and withal, a clever one.

Father Mackworth bowed, and was pleased with the compliment. His nerve was in perfect order, and he was glad to find that Lord Hainault was well inclined towards him, though just at this time the Most Noble the Marquis of Hainault was of less importance to him than one of the grooms in the stable. What he required of himself just now was to act and look in a particular way, and to do it naturally and without effort. His genius rose to the situation. He puzzled Lord Saltire.

"This is a sad business," said Lord Saltire.

"A bitter business," said Mackworth. "I loved that man, my lord."

He looked suddenly up as he said it, and Lord Saltire saw that he was in earnest. He waited for him to go on,

watching him intently with his eyelids half dropped over his grey eagle eyes.

"That is not of much consequence, though," said Father Mackworth. "Speaking to a man of the world, what is more to the purpose is, to hear what is the reason of your lordship's having sought this interview. I am very anxious to know that, and so, if I appear rude, I must crave forgiveness."

Lord Saltire looked at him minutely and steadily. How Mackworth looked was of more importance to Lord Saltire than what he said. On the other hand, Mackworth every now and then calmly and steadily raised his eyes to Lord Saltire's, and kept them fixed there while he spoke to him.

"Not at all, my dear sir," said Lord Saltire. "If you will have business first, however, which is possibly the best plan, we will have it, and improve our acquaintance afterwards. I asked you to come to me to speak of family matters. You have seen our advertisement?"

"I have, indeed," said Mackworth, looking up with a smile. "I was utterly taken by surprise. Do you think that you can be right about this marriage?"

"Oh! I am sure of it," said Lord Saltire.

"I cannot believe it," said Mackworth. "And I'll tell you why. If it ever took place, I *must* have heard of it. Father Clifford, my predecessor, was Petre Ravenshoe's

confessor. I need not tell you that he must have been in possession of the fact. Your knowledge of the world will tell you how impossible it is that, in a house so utterly priest-ridden as the House of Ravenshoe, an affair of such moment could be kept from the knowledge of the father-confessor. Especially when the delinquent, if I may so express myself, was the most foolishly bigoted, and cowardly representative of that house which had appeared for many generations. I assure you, upon my honour, that Clifford *must* have known it. And, if he had known of it, he must have communicated it to me. No priest could possibly have died without leaving such a secret to his successor; a secret which would make the owner of it—that is, the priest—so completely the master of Ravenshoe and all in it. I confessed that man on his deathbed, my lord," said Mackworth, looking quietly at Lord Saltire, with a smile, "and I can only tell you, if you can bring yourself to believe a priest, that there was not one word said about his marriage."

"No?" said Lord Saltire, pensively looking out of the window. "And yet Lady Ascot seems so positive."

"I sincerely hope," said Mackworth, "that she may be wrong. It would be a sad thing for me. I am comfortable and happy at Ravenshoe. Poor dear Cuthbert

has secured my position there during my lifetime. The present Mr. Ravenshoe is not so tractable as his brother, but I can get on well enough with him. But, in case of this story being true, and Mr. Charles Horton coming back, my position would be untenable, and Ravenshoe would be in Protestant hands for the first time in history. I should lose my home, and the Church would lose one of its best houses in the west. The best, in fact. I had sooner be at Ravenshoe than at Segur. I am very much pleased at your lordship's having sought this conference. It shows you have some trust in me, to consult me upon a matter in which my own interests are all on one side."

Lord Saltire bowed. "There is another way to look at the matter, too, my dear sir. If we prove our case, which is possible, and in case of our poor dear Charles dying or getting killed, which is probable, why then William comes in for the estate again. Suppose, now, such a possibility as his dying without heirs; why, then, Miss Ravenshoe is the greatest heiress in the west of England. Have you any idea where Miss Ravenshoe is?"

Both Lord Saltire and Lord Hainault turned on him as the former said this. For an instant Mackworth looked inquiringly from one to the other, with his lips slightly parted, and said, "Miss Ravenshoe?" Then he

gave a half-smile of intelligence, and said, "Ah! yes; I was puzzled for a moment. Yes, in that case poor Ellen would be Miss Ravenshoe. Yes, and the estate would remain in Catholic hands. What a prospect for the Church! A penitent heiress! The management of 12,000*l.* a year! Forgive my being carried away for a moment. You know I am an enthusiastic Churchman. I have been bound, body and soul, to the Church from a child, and such a prospect, even in such remote perspective, has dazzled me. But I am afraid I shall see rather a large family of Ravenshoes between me and such a consummation. William is going to marry."

"Then you do not know where poor Ellen is?" said Lord Saltire.

"I do not," said Mackworth; "but I certainly shall try to discover, and most certainly I shall succeed. William might die on this very expedition. You might prove your case. If anything were to happen to William, I most certainly hope you may, and will give you every assistance. For half a loaf is better than no bread. And beside, Charles also might be killed, or die of cholera. As it is, I shall not move in the matter. I shall not help you to bring a Protestant to Ravenshoe. Now don't think me a heartless man for talking like this; I am nothing of the kind. But I am talking to

two very shrewd men of the world, and I talk as a man of the world; that is all."

At this point, Lord Hainault said, "What is that?" and left the room. Lord Saltire and Mackworth were alone together.

"Now, my dear sir," said Lord Saltire, "I am glad you have spoken merely as a man of the world. It makes matters so much easier. You could help us if you would."

Mackworth laughed. "Of course I could, my lord. I could bring the whole force of the Catholic Church, at my back, to give assistance. With our powers of organization, we could discover all about the marriage in no time (if it ever took place, which I don't choose to believe just now). Why it would pay us to search minutely every register in England, if it were to keep such a house in the hands of the Church. But the Catholic Church, in my poor person, politely declines to move all its vast machinery, to give away one of its best houses to a Protestant."

"I never supposed that the dear old lady would do anything of the kind. But, as for Mr. Mackworth, will nothing induce *him* to move *his* vast machinery in our cause?"

"I am all attention, my lord."

"In case of our finding Charles, then?"

"Yes," said Mackworth, calmly.

"Twenty thousand?"

"No," said Mackworth. "It wouldn't do. Twenty million wouldn't do. You see there is a difference between a soldier disguising himself, and going into the enemy's camp, to lie, and it may be, murder, to gain information for his own side, and the same soldier deserting to the enemy, and giving information. The one is a hero, and the other a rogue. I am a hero. You must forgive me putting matters so coarsely, but you distrust me so entirely that I am forced to do so."

"I do not think you have put it so coarsely," said Lord Saltire. "I have to ask your forgiveness for this offer of money, which you have so nobly refused. They say, every man has his price. If this is the case, yours is a very high one, and you should be valued accordingly."

"Now, my lord, before we conclude this interview, let me tell you two things, which may be of advantage to you. The first is, that you cannot buy a Jesuit."

"A Jesuit!"

"Ay. And the next thing is this. This marriage of Petre Ravenshoe is all a fiction of Lady Ascot's brain. I wish you good morning, my lord."

There are two sides to every door. You grant that. A man cannot be in two places at once. You grant that, without the exception made by the Irish member. Very well then. I am going to describe what took place on both sides of the library door at the conclusion of this interview. Which side shall I describe first?

That is entirely as I choose, and I choose to describe the outside first. The side where Father Mackworth was. This paragraph and the last are written in imitation of the Shandean-Southey-Doctorian style. The imitation is a bad one, I find, and approaches nearer to the lower style known among critics as Swivellerism; which consists in saying the first thing that comes into your head. Any style would be quite allowable, merely as a rest to one's aching brain, after the dreadfully keen encounter between Lord Saltire and Father Mackworth, recorded above.

When Mackworth had closed the library door behind him, he looked at it for a moment, as if to see it was safe, and then his whole face underwent a change. It grew haggard and anxious, and, as he parted his lips to moisten them, the lower one trembled. His eyes seemed to grow more prominent, and a leaden ring began to settle round them; he paused in a window, and raised his hand towards his head. When he had

raised it half way he looked at it; it was shaking violently.

"I am not the man I was," he said. "These great field-days upset me. My nerve is going, God help me. It is lucky that I was really puzzled by his calling her Miss Ravenshoe. If I had not been all abroad, I could never have done so well. I must be very careful. My nerve ought not to go like this. I have lived a temperate life in every way. Possibly a little too temperate. I won't go through another interview of this kind without wine. It is not safe.

"The chances are ten to one in favour of one never hearing of Charles again. Shot and steel and cholera. Then William only to think of. In that case I am afraid I should like to bring in the elder branch of the family, to that young gentleman's detriment. I wish my nerve was better; this irritability increases on me in spite of all my care. I wish I could stand wine.

"Ravenshoe, with Ellen for its mistress, and Mackworth living there as her master! A penitential devotee, and a clever man for confessor! And twelve thousand a year! If we Jesuits were such villains as the Protestants try to make us out, Master William would be unwise to live in the house with me.

"I wonder if Lord Saltire guesses that I hold the clue in my hand. I can't remember the interview.

or what I said. My memory begins to go. They should put a younger man in such a place. But I would not yield to another man. No. The stakes are too high. I wish I could remember what I said.

"Does William dream that, in case of Charles's death, he is standing between me and the light? At all events, Lord Saltire sees it. I wonder if I committed myself. I remember I was very honest and straightforward. What was it I said at last? I have an uneasy feeling about that, but I can't remember.

"I hope that Butler will keep the girl well in hand. If I was to get ill, it would all rest with him. God! I hope I shall not get ill."

Now we will go to the other side of the door. Lord Saltire sat quietly upright in his chair until the door was safely closed. Then he took a pinch of snuff. He did not speak aloud, but he looked cunningly at the door, and said to himself—

"Odd!"

Another pinch of snuff. Then he said aloud, "Uncommon curious, by Ged."

"What is curious?" said Lord Hainault, who had come into the room.

"Why, that fellow. He took me in to the last moment. I thought he was going to be simply honest; but he betrayed himself by over-eagerness at the end.

His look of frank honesty was assumed; the real man came out in the last sentence. You should have seen how his face changed, when he turned sharply on me, after fancying he had lulled suspicion to sleep, and told me that the marriage was a fiction. He forgot his manners for the first time, and laid his hand upon my knee."

"Lord Hainault said, "Do you think that he knows about the marriage?"

"I am sure he does. And he knows where Ellen is."

"Why?"

"Because I am sure of it."

"That is hardly a reason, my dear Lord Saltire. Don't you think, eh?"

"Think what?"

"Think that you are—well," said Lord Hainault, in a sort of desperation, "are not you, my dear lord, to put it very mildly, generalizing from an insufficient number of facts? I speak with all humility before one of the shrewdest men in Europe; but don't you think so?"

"No, I don't," said Lord Saltire.

"I bow," said Lord Hainault. "The chances are ten to one that you are right, and I am wrong. Did you make the offer?"

"Yes."

"And did he accept it?"

"Of course, he didn't. I told you he wouldn't."

"That is strange, is it not?"

"No," said Lord Saltire.

Lord Hainault laughed, and then Lord Saltire looked up and laughed too. "I like being rude to you, Hainault. You are so solemn."

"Well," said Lord Hainault, with another hearty laugh. "And what are we to do now?"

"Why, wait till William comes back," said Lord Saltire. "We can do nothing till then, my dear boy. God bless you, Hainault. You are a good fellow."

When the old man was left alone, he rose and looked out of the window. The bucks were feeding together close under the windows; and, farther off, under the shadow of the mighty cedars, the does and fawns were standing and lying about lazily, shaking their broad ears, and stamping their feet. Out from the great rhododendron thickets, right and left of the house, the pheasants were coming to spend the pleasant evening-tide in running to and fro, and scratching at the ant-hills. The rabbits too were showing out among the grass, scuttling about busily. The peacock had lit down from the stable roof, and was elegantly picking his way and dragging his sweeping train among the pheasants and the rabbits; and on the topmost, copper-red, cedar-

boughs, some guinea fowl were noisily preparing for roost. One hundred yards from the window the park seemed to end, for it dipped suddenly down in a precipitous, almost perpendicular slope of turf, three hundred and fifty feet high, towards the river, which you could see winding on for miles through the richly wooded valley; a broad riband of silver, far below. Beyond, wooded hills: on the left, endless folds of pearl-coloured downs; to the right, the town, a fantastic grey and red heap of buildings, lying along from the river, which brimmed full up to its wharfs and lane ends; and, over it, a lazy cloud of smoke, from which came the gentle booming of golden-toned bells.

Casterton is not a show-place. Lord Hainault has a whim about it. But you may see just such a scene, with variations, of course, from Park-place, or Hedsor, or Chiefden, or fifty other houses on the king of rivers. I wonder when the tour of the Thames will become fashionable. I have never seen anything like it, in its way. And I have seen a great many things.

Lord Saltire looked out on all this which I have roughly described (for a reason). And, as he looked, he spoke to himself, thus, or nearly so—

"And so I am the last of them all; and alone. Hardly one of them left. Hardly one. And their sons are feeding their pheasants, and planting their shrub

beries still, as we did. And the things that were terrible realities for us, are only printed words for them, which they try to realize, but cannot. The thirty mad long years, through which we stood with our backs to the wall, are ticketed as 'the revolutionary wars,' and put in a pigeon-hole. I wish they would do us justice. We *were* right. Hainault's pheasants prove it. They must pay their twenty million a year, and thank us that they have got off so easy.

"I wonder what *they* would do, in such a pinch as we had. They seem to be as brave as ever; but I am afraid of their getting too much unbrutalized for another struggle like ours. I suppose I am wrong, for I am getting too old to appreciate new ideas, but I am afraid of our getting too soft. It is a by-gone prejudice, I am afraid. One comfort is, that such a struggle can never come again. If it did, they might have the will to do all that we did, and more, but have they the power? This extension of the suffrage has played the devil, and now they want to extend it farther, the madmen! They'll end by having a House full of Whigs. And then—why, then, I suppose, there'll be nothing but Whigs in the House. That seems to me near about what will happen. Well! well! I was a Whig myself once on a time.

"All gone. Every one of them. And I left on here,

in perfect health and preservation, as much an object of wonder to the young ones as a dodo would be to a poultry-fancier. Before the effect of our deeds has been fully felt, our persons have become strange, and out of date. And yet I, strange to say, don't want to go yet. I want to see that Ravenshoe boy again. Gad! how I love that boy. He has just Barkham's sweet, gentle, foolish way with him. I determined to make him my heir from the first time I saw him at Ranford, if he turned out well. If I had announced it, everything would have gone right. What an endless series of unlucky accidents that poor boy has had.

"Just like Barkham. The same idle, foolish, lovable creature, with anger for nothing; only furious, blind indignation for injustice and wrong. I wish he would come back. I am getting aweary of waiting.

"I wonder if I shall see Barkham again, just to sit with my arm on his shoulder, as I used to on the terrace in old times. Only for one short half-hour—"

I shall leave off here. I don't want to follow the kind old heathen through his vague speculations about a future state. You see how he had loved his son. You see why he loved Charles. That is all I wished to show you.

"And if Charles don't come back? By Gad! I am

very much afraid the chances are against it. Well, I suppose, if the poor lad dies, I must leave the money to Welter and his wife, if it is only for the sake of poor Ascot, who was a good fellow. I wonder if we shall ever get to the bottom of this matter about the marriage. I fancy not, unless Charles dies, in which case Ellen will be reinstated by the priest.

"I hope William will make haste back with him. Old fellows like me are apt to go off in a minute. And if he dies, and I have not time to make a will, the whole goes to the Crown, which will be a bore. I would sooner Welter had it than that."

Lord Saltire stood looking out of the library window, until the river looked like a chain of crimson pools, stretching westward towards the sinking sun. The room behind him grew dark, and the marble pillars, which divided it in unequal portions, stood like ghosts in the gloom. He was hidden by the curtain, and presently he heard the door open, and a light footstep stealthily approaching over the Turkey carpet. There was a rustle of a woman's dress, and a moving of books on the centre table, by some hand which evidently feared detection. Lord Saltire stepped from behind his curtain, and confronted Mary Corby.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN ARCHER TURNS UP.

"Do not betray me, my lord," said Mary, from out of the gloom.

"I will declare your malpractices to the four winds of heaven, Miss Corby, as soon as I know what they are. Why, why do you come rustling into the room like a mouse in the dark? Tell me at once what this hole-and-corner work means."

"I will not, unless you promise not to betray me, Lord Saltire."

"Now just think how foolish you are. How can I possibly make myself particeps, of what is evidently a most dark and nefarious business, without knowing beforehand what benefit I am to receive? You offer me no share of booty; you offer me no advantage, direct or indirect, in exchange for my silence, except that of being put in possession of facts which it is probably dangerous to know anything about. How can you expect to buy me on such terms as these?"

"Well, then, I will throw myself on your generosity. I want *Blackwood*. If I can find *Blackwood* now, I shall get a full hour at it to myself while you are all at dinner. Do you know where it is?"

"Yes," said Lord Saltire.

"Do tell me, please. I do so want to finish a story in it. Please to tell me where it is."

"I won't."

"Why not? How very unkind. We have been friends eight months now, and you are just beginning to be cross to me. You see how familiarity breeds contempt; you used to be so polite."

"I shan't tell you where *Blackwood* is," said Lord Saltire, "because I don't choose. I don't want you to have it. I want you to sit here in the dark and talk to me, instead of reading it."

"I will sit and talk to you in the dark; only you must not tell ghost stories."

"I want you to sit in the dark," said Lord Saltire, "because I want to be '*vox et præterea nihil*.' You will see why, directly. My dear Mary Corby, I want to have some very serious talk with you. Let us joke no more."

Mary settled herself at once into the arm-chair opposite Lord Saltire, and, resting her cheek on her hand, turned her face towards the empty fire-place. "Now,

my dear Lord Saltire," she said, "go on. I think I can anticipate what you are going to say."

"You mean about Charles."

"Yes."

"Ah, that is only a part of what I have to say. I want to consult you there, certainly; but that is but a small part of the business."

"Then I am curious."

"Do you know, then, I am between eighty and ninety years old?"

"I have heard so, my lord."

"Well then, I think that the voice to which you are now listening will soon be silent for ever; and do not take offence; consider it as a dead man's voice, if you will."

"I will listen to it as the voice of a kind living friend," said Mary. "A friend who has always treated me as a reasonable being and an equal."

"That is true, Mary; you are so gentle and so clever, that is no wonder. See here; you have no private fortune."

"I have my profession," said Mary, laughing.

"Yes, but your profession is one in which it is difficult to rise," said Lord Saltire, "and so I have thought it necessary to provide for you in my will. For I must make a new one."

Poor Mary gave a start. The announcement was so utterly unexpected. She did not know what to say, or what to think. She had had long night thoughts about poverty, old age, a life in a garret as a needlewoman, and so on; and had many a good cry over them, and had never found any remedy for them except saying her prayers, which she always found a perfect specific. And here, all of a sudden, was the question solved! She would have liked to thank Lord Saltire. She would have liked to kiss his hand; but words were rather deficient. She tried to keep her tears back, and she in a way succeeded; then in the honesty of her soul she spoke.

"I will thank you more heartily, my lord, than if I went down on my knees and kissed your feet. All my present has been darkened by a great cloud of old age and poverty in the distance. You have swept that cloud away. Can I say more?"

"On your life, not another word. I could have overburdened you with wealth, but I have chosen not to do so. Twenty thousand pounds will enable you to live as you have been brought up. Believe an old man when he says that more would be a plague to you."

"Twenty thousand pounds!"

"Yes. That will bring you in, you will find, about six hundred a year. Take my word for it, it is quite enough. You will be able to keep your brougham, and

all that sort of thing. Believe me, you would not be so happy with more."

"More!" said Mary quietly. "My lord, look here, and see what you have done. When the children are going to sleep, I sit, and sew, and sing, and, when they are gone to sleep, I still sit, and sew, and think. Then I build my Spanish castles; but the highest tower of my castle has risen to this—that in my old age I should have ten shillings a week left me by some one, and be able to keep a canary bird, and have some old woman as pensioner. And now—now—now. Oh! I'll be quiet in a moment. Don't speak to me for a moment. God is very good."

I hope Lord Saltire enjoyed his snuff. I think that, if he did not, he deserved to. After a pause Mary began again.

"Have I left on you the impression that I am selfish? I am almost afraid I have. Is it not so? I have one favour to ask of you. Will you grant it?"

"Certainly I will."

"On your honour, my lord."

"On my honour."

"Reduce the sum you have mentioned to one-fourth. I have bound you by your honour. Oh, don't make me a great heiress; I am not fit for it."

Lord Saltire said, "Pish! If you say another word,

I will leave you ten thousand more. To the deuce with my honour; don't talk nonsense."

"You said you were going to be quiet in a moment," he resumed presently. "Are you quiet now?"

"Yes, my lord; quiet and happy."

"Are you glad I spoke to you in the dark?"

"Yes."

"You will be more glad that it was in the dark directly. Is Charles Ravenshoe quite the same to you as other men?"

"No," said Mary; "that he most certainly is not. I could have answered that question *to you* in the brightest daylight."

"Humph!" said Lord Saltire. "I wish I could see him and you comfortably married, do you know? I hope I speak plain enough. If I don't, perhaps you will be so good as to mention it, and I'll try to speak a little plainer."

"Nay; I quite understand you. I wonder if you will understand me, when I say that such a thing is utterly and totally out of the question."

"I was afraid so. You are a pair of simpletons. My dear daughter (you must let me call you so), you must contemplate the contingency I have hinted at in the dark. I know that the best way to get a man rejected, is to recommend him; I, therefore, only say, that John

Marston loves you with his whole heart and soul, and that he is a *protégé* of mine."

"I am speaking to you as I would to my own father. John Marston asked me to be his wife last Christmas, and I refused him."

"Oh, yes. I knew all about that the same evening. It was the evening after they were nearly drowned out fishing. Then there is no hope of a reconsideration there?"

"Not the least," said Mary. "My lord, I will never marry."

"I have not distressed you?"

"Certainly not. You have a right to speak as you have. I am not a silly hysterical girl either, that I cannot talk on such subjects without affectation. But I will never marry; I will be an old maid. I will write novels, or something of that sort. I will not even marry Captain Archer, charm he never so wisely."

"Captain Archer! Who on earth is Captain Archer?"

"Don't you know Captain Archer, my lord?" replied Mary, laughing heartily, but ending her laugh with a short sob. "Avast heaving! Bear a hand, my hearties, and let us light this taper. I think you ought to read his letter. He is the man who swam with me out of the cruel sea, when the *Warren Hastings* went down. That

is who he is, Lord Saltire." And at this point, little Mary, thoroughly unhinged by this strange conversation, broke down, and began crying her eyes out, and, putting a letter into his hand, rose to leave the room.

He held the door open for her. "My dear Mary," he said, "if I have been coarse or rude, you must try to forgive me."

"Your straightforward kindness," she said, "is less confusing than the most delicate finesse." And so she went.

Captain Archer is one of the very best men I know. If you and I, reader, continue our acquaintance, you will soon know more of him than you have been able to gather from the pages of Ravenshoe. He was in person perhaps the grandest and handsomest fellow you ever saw. He was gentle, brave, and courteous. In short, the best example I have ever seen of the best class of sailor. By birth he was a gentleman, and he had carefully made himself a gentleman in manners. Neither from his dress, which was always scrupulously neat and in good taste, nor from his conversation, would you guess that he was a sailor, unless in a very select circle, where he would, if he thought it pleased or amused, talk salt water by the yard. The reason why he had written to Mary in the following style was, that he knew she loved it, and he wished to make her laugh. Lord

Saltire set him down for a mad seaman, and nothing more. You will see that he had so thoroughly obscured what he meant to say, that he left Mary with the very natural impression that he was going to propose to her.

. He had done it, he said, from Port Philip Heads, in sixty-four days, at last, in consequence of one of his young gentlemen (merchant midshipmen) having stole a black cat in Flinder's-lane, and brought her aboard. He had caught the westerly wind off the Leuwin and carried it down to 62°, through the ice, and round the Horn, where he had met a cyclone, by special appointment, and carried the outside edge of it past the Auroras. That during this time it had blown so hard, that it was necessary for three midshipmen to be on deck with him night and day, to hold his hair on. That, getting too near the centre, he had found it necessary to lay her to, which he had successfully done, by tying one of his false collars in the fore weather-rigging. And so on. Giving an absurd account of his whole voyage, evidently with the intention of making her laugh.

He concluded thus: "And now, my dear Mary, I am going to surprise you. I am getting rich, and I am thinking of getting married. Have you ever thought of such a thing? Your present dependence must be irksome. Begin to contemplate a change to a happier and

freer mode of life. I will explain more fully when I come to you. I shall have much to tell you which will surprise you; but you know I love you, and only study your happiness. When the first pang of breaking off old associations is over, the new life, to such a quiet spirit as yours, becomes at first bearable, then happy. A past is soon created. Think of what I have said, before I come to you. Your future, my dear, is not a very bright one. It is a source of great anxiety to me, who love you so dearly—you little know how dearly."

I appeal to any young lady to say whether or no dear Mary was to blame if she thought good, blundering Archer, was going to propose to her. If they give it against her, and declare that there is nothing in the above letter leading to such a conclusion, I can only say that Lord Saltire went with her and with me, and regarded the letter as written preparatory to a proposal. Archer's dismay, when we afterwards let him know this, was delightful to behold. His wife was put in possession of the fact, by some one who shall be nameless, and I have heard that jolly soul use her information against him in the most telling manner on critical occasions.

But, before Captain Archer came, there came a letter from William, from Varna, announcing Charles's death of cholera. There are melancholy scenes, more than enough, in this book, and alas! one more to come; so

I may spare you the description of their woe at the intelligence, which we know to be false. The letter was closely followed by William himself, who showed them the grass from his grave. This helped to confirm their impression of its truth, however unreasonable. Lord Saltire had a correspondence with the Horse Guards, long and windy, which resulted, after months, in discovering that no man had enlisted in the 140th under the name of Horton. This proved nothing, for Charles might have enlisted under a false name, and yet might have been known by his real name to an intimate comrade.

Lord Saltire wrote to General Mainwaring. But, by the time his letter reached him, that had happened which made it easy for a fool to count on his fingers the number of men left in the 140th. Among the dead or among the living, no signs of Charles Ravenshoe.

General Mainwaring was, as we all know, wounded on Cathcart's Hill, and came home. The news which he brought about the doings of the 140th we shall have from first hand. But he gave them no hope about Charles.

Lord Saltire and General Mainwaring had a long interview, and a long consultation. Lord Hainault and the General witnessed his will. There were some legacies to servants; twenty thousand pounds to Miss Corby;

ten thousand to John Marston; fifty thousand pounds to Lady Ascot; and the rest, amounting in one way or another, to nearly five hundred thousand pounds, was left to Lord Ascot (our old acquaintance, Lord Welter) and his heirs for ever.

There was another clause in the will, carefully worded —carefully guarded about by every legal fence which could be erected by law, and by money to buy that law —to the effect that, if Charles should reappear, he was to come into a fortune of eighty thousand pounds, funded property.

Now please to mark this. Lord Ascot was informed by General Mainwaring that, the death of Charles Ravenshoe being determined on as being a fact, Lord Saltire had made his will in his (Lord Ascot's) favour. I pray you to remember this. Lord Ascot knew no particulars, only that the will was in his favour. If you do not keep this in mind, it would be just as well if there had been no Lord Welter at all in the story.

Ravenshoe and its poor twelve thousand a year begin to sink into insignificance, you see. But still we must attend to it. How did Charles's death affect Mackworth? Rather favourably. The property could not come into the hands of a Protestant now. William was a staunch Catholic, though rebellious and disagreeable. If anything happened to him, why, then there was Ellen

to be produced. Things might have been better, certainly, but they were certainly improved by that young cub's death, and by the cessation of all search for the marriage register. And so on. If you care to waste time on it, you may think it all through for yourselves, as did not Father Mackworth.

And I'll tell you why. Father Mackworth had had a stroke of paralysis, as men will have, who lead, as he did, a life of worry and excitement, without taking proper nourishment; and he was lying, half idiotic, in the priest's tower at Ravenshoe.

CHAPTER V.

CHARLES MEETS HORNBY AT LAST.

Oh for the whispering woodlands of Devna! Oh for the quiet summer evenings above the lakes, looking far away at the white-walled town on the distant shore! No more hare-shooting, no more turtle-catching, for you, my dear Charles. The allies had determined to take Sebastopol, and winter in the town. It was a very dull place, every one said; but there was a race-course, and there would be splendid boat-racing in the harbour. The country about the town was reported to be romantic, and there would be pleasant excursions in the winter to Simpheropol, a gayer town than Sebastopol, and where there was more society. They were not going to move till the spring, when they were to advance up the valley of the Dneiper to Moscow, while a flying column was to be sent to follow the course of the Don, cross to the Volga at Suratow, and so penetrate into the Ural Mountains and seize the gold mines, or do something of this sort; it was all laid out quite plain.

Now, don't call this *ex post facto* wisdom, but just try to remember what extravagant ideas every non-military man had that autumn about what our army would do. The ministers of the King of Lernè never laid down a more glorious campaign than we did. "I will," says poor Picrochole, "give him fair quarter, and spare his life—I will rebuild Solomon's Temple—I will give you Caramania, Syria, and all Palestine." "Ha! sire," said they, "it is out of your goodness. Grammercy, we thank you." We have had our little lesson about that kind of amusement. There has been none of it in this American business; but our good friends the other side of the Atlantic are worse than they were in the time of the Pogram defiance. Either they don't file their newspapers, or else they console themselves by saying that they could have done it all if they had liked.

It now becomes my duty to use all the resources of my art to describe Charles's emotions at the first sight of Sebastopol. Such an opportunity for the display of beautiful language should not be let slip. I could do it capitally by buying a copy of Mr. Russell's "War," or even by using the correspondence I have on the table before me. But I think you will agree with me that it is better left alone. One hardly likes to come into the field in that line after Russell.

Balaclava was not such a pleasant place as Devna. It was bare and rocky, and everything was in confusion, and the men were dying in heaps of cholera. The nights were beginning to grow chill, too, and Charles began to dream regularly, that he was sleeping on the bare hill-side, in a sharp frost, and that he was agonisingly cold about the small of his back. And the most singular thing was, that he always woke and found his dream come true. At first he only used to dream this dream towards morning; but, as October began to creep on, he used to wake with it several times in the night, and at last hardly used to go to sleep at all for fear of dreaming it.

Were there no other dreams? No. No dreams, but one ever-present reality. A dull aching regret for a past for ever gone. A heavy deadly grief, lost for a time among the woods of Devna, but come back to him now amidst the cold, and the squalor, and the sickness of Balaclava. A brooding over missed opportunities, and the things that might have been. Sometimes a tangled puzzled train of thought, as to how much of this ghastly misery was his own fault, and how much accident. And above all, a growing desire for death, unknown before.

And all this time, behind the hill, the great guns, which had begun a fitful muttering when they first

came there, often dying off into silence; now day by day, as trench after trench was opened, grew louder and more continuous, till hearing and thought were deadened, and the soul was sick of their never-ceasing melancholy thunder.

And at six o'clock on the morning of the seventeenth, such an infernal din began as no man there had ever heard before, which grew louder and louder till nine, when it seemed impossible that the ear could bear the accumulation of sound: and then suddenly doubled, as the *Agamemnon* and the *Montebello*, followed by the fleets, steamed in, and laid broadside-to under the forts. Four thousand pieces of the heaviest ordnance in the world were doing their work over that hill, and the 140th stood dismounted and listened.

At ten o'clock the earth shook, and a column of smoke towered up in the air above the hill, and as it began to hang motionless, the sound of it reached them. It was different from the noise of guns. It was something new and terrible. An angry hissing roar. An hour after they heard that twenty tons of powder were blown up in the French lines.

Soon after this, though, there was work to be done, and plenty of it. The wounded were being carried to the rear. Some cavalry were dismounted and told off for the work. Charles was one of them.

The wind had not yet sprung up, and all that Charles saw for the moment was a valley full of smoke, and fire, and sound. He caught a glimpse of the spars and funnel of a great liner above the smoke to the left; but directly after they were under fire, and the sickening day's work began.

Death and horror in every form, of course. The wounded lying about in heaps. Officers trying to compose their faces, and die like gentlemen. Old Indian soldiers dying grimly as they had lived; and lads, fresh from the plough last year, listed at the market-cross some unlucky Saturday, sitting up staring before them with a look of terror and wonder: sadder sight than either. But everywhere all the day, where the shot screamed loudest, where the shell fell thickest, with his shako gone, with his ambrosial curls tangled with blood, with his splendid gaudy fripperies soiled with dust and sweat, was Hornby, the dandy, the fop, the dicer; doing the work of ten, carrying out the wounded in his arms, encouraging the dying, cheering on the living.

"I knew there was some stuff in him," said Charles, as he followed him into the Crown battery; just at that time the worst place of all, for *The Twelve Apostles* had begun dropping red-hot shot into it, and exploded some ammunition, and killed some men. And they had

met a naval officer, known to Hornby, wounded, staggering to the rear, who said, "that his brother was knocked over, and that they wanted to make out that he was dead, but he had only fainted." So they went back with him. The officer's brother was dead enough, poor fellow; but as Charles and Hornby bent suddenly over him to look at him, their faces actually touched.

Hornby did not recognise him. He was in a state of excitement, and was thinking of no one less than Charles, and Charles's moustaches had altered him, as I said before. If their eyes had met, I believe Hornby would have known him; but it was not to be till the 25th, and this was only the 17th. If Hornby could only have known him, if they could only have had ten minutes' talk together, Charles would have known all that we know about the previous marriage of his grandfather: and, if that conversation had taken place, he would have known more than any of them, for Hornby knew something which he thought of no importance, which was very important indeed. He knew where Ellen was.

But Charles turned his face away, and the recognition did not take place. Poor Charles said afterwards, that it was all a piece of luck—that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." It is not the case. He

turned away his eyes, and avoided the recognition. What he meant is this:—

As Hornby's face was touching his, and they were both bending over the dead man, whom they could hardly believe to be dead, the men behind them fired off the great Lancaster in the next one-gun battery. "Crack!" and they heard the shell go piff, piff, piff, piff, and strike something. And then one man close to them cried out, "God Almighty!" and another cried "Christ!" as sailors will at such awful times; and they both leapt to their feet. Above the smoke there hung, a hundred of feet in the air, a something like a vast black pine tree; and, before they had time to realize what had happened, there was a horrible roar, and a concussion which made them stagger on their legs. A shell from the Lancaster had blown up the great redoubt in front of the Redan wall, and every Russian gun ceased firing. And above the sound of the Allied guns rose the cheering of our own men, sounding amidst the awful bass, like the shrill treble of school-children at play.

Charles said afterwards that this glorious accident prevented their recognition. It is not true. He prevented it himself, and took the consequences. But Hornby recognised him on the twenty-fifth in this wise:—

The first thing in the morning, they saw, on the hills to the right, Russian skirmishers creeping about towards them, apparently without an object. They had breakfast, and took no notice of them till about eight o'clock, when a great body of cavalry came slowly, regiment by regiment, from behind a hill near the Turks. Then gleaming batteries of artillery; and, lastly, an endless, column of grey infantry, which began to wheel into line. And when Charles had seen some five or six grey battalions come swinging out, the word was given to mount, and he saw no more, but contemplated the tails of horses. And at the same moment the guns began an irregular fire on their right.

Almost immediately the word was given to advance, which they did slowly. Charles could see Hornby just before him, in his old place, for they were in column. They crossed the plain, and went up the crest of the hill, halting on the high road. Here they sat for some time, and the more fortunate could see the battle raging below to the right. The English seemed getting rather the worst of it.

They sat there about an hour and a half; and all in a moment, before any one seemed to expect it, some guns opened on them from the right; so close that it made their right ears tingle. A horse from the squadron in front of Charles bolted from the ranks, and nearly

knocked down Hornby. The horse had need to bolt, for he carried a dead man, who in the last spasm had pulled him on his haunches, and struck his spurs deep into his sides.

Charles began to guess that they were "in for it" at last. He had no idea, of course, whether it was a great battle or a little one; but he saw that the 140th had work before them. I, of course, have only to speak of what Charles saw with his own eyes, and what therefore bears upon the story I am telling you. That was the only man he saw killed at that time, though the whole brigade suffered rather heavily by the Russian cannonade at that spot.

Very shortly after this they were told to form line. Of course, when this manœuvre was acomplished, Charles had lost sight of Hornby. He was sorry for this. He would have liked to know where he was; to help him, if possible, should anything happen to him; but there was not much time to think of it, for directly after they moved forward at a canter. In the front line were the 11th Hussars and the 13th Light Dragoons, and in the second were the 140th Hussars,[1] the 8th Hussars, and the 4th Dragoons. Charles could see thus much, now they were in line.

[1] If one has to raise an imaginary regiment, one must put it in an imaginary place. The 17th Dragoons must try to forgive me.

They went down hill, straight towards the guns, and almost at once the shot from them began to tell. The men of the 11th and 13th began to fall terribly fast. The men in the second line, in which Charles was, were falling nearly as fast, but this he could not remark. He missed the man next him on the right, one of his favourite comrades, but it did not strike him that the poor fellow was cut in two by a shot. He kept on wishing that he could see Hornby. He judged that the affair was getting serious. He little knew what was to come.

He had his wish of seeing Hornby, for they were riding up hill into a narrowing valley, and it was impossible to keep line. They formed into column again, though men and horses were rolling over and over at every stride, and there was Hornby before him, sailing along as gallant and gay as ever. A fine beacon to lead a man to a glorious death.

And, almost the next moment, the batteries right and left opened on them. Those who were there engaged can give us very little idea of what followed in the next quarter of an hour. They were soon among guns—the very guns that had annoyed them from the first; and infantry beyond opened fire on them. There seems to have been a degree of confusion at this point. Charles, and two or three others known to him, were hunting

some Russian Artillerymen round their guns, for a minute or so. Hornby was among them. He saw also at this time his little friend the cornet, on foot, and rode to his assistance. He caught a riderless horse, and the cornet mounted. Then the word was given to get back again; I know not how; I have nothing to do with it. But, as they turned their faces to get out of this horrible hell, poor Charles gave a short, sharp scream, and bent down in his saddle over his horse's neck.

It was nothing. It was only as if one were to have twenty teeth pulled out at once. The pain was over in an instant. What a fool he was to cry out! The pain was gone again, and they were still under fire, and Hornby was before him.

How long? How many minutes, how many hours? His left arm was nearly dead, but he could hold his reins in a way, and rode hard after Hornby, from some wild instinct. The pain had stopped, but was coming on again as if ten thousand red-hot devils were pulling at his flesh, and twenty thousand were arriving each moment to help them.

His own friends were beside him again, and there was a rally and a charge. At what? he thought for an instant. At guns? No. At men this time, Russian hussars—right valiant fellows, too. He saw Hornby in the thick of the *mêlée*, with his sword flickering about

his head like lightning. He could do but little himself; he rode at a Russian and unhorsed him; he remembers seeing the man go down, though whether he struck at him, or whether he went down by the mere superior weight of his horse, he cannot say. This I can say, though, that whatever he did, he did his duty as a valiant gentleman; I will go bail for that much.

They beat them back, and then turned. Then they turned again and beat them back once more. And then they turned and rode. For it was time. Charles lost sight of Hornby till the last, when some one caught his rein and turned his horse, and then he saw that they were getting into order again, and that Hornby was before him, reeling in his saddle.

As the noise of the battle grew fainter behind them, he looked round to see who was riding beside him, and holding him by the right arm. It was the little cornet. Charles wondered why he did so. "You're hard hit, Simpson." said the cornet. "Never mind. Keep your saddle a little longer. We shall be all right directly."

His faculties were perfectly acute, and, having thanked the cornet, he looked down and noticed that he was riding between him and a trooper, that his left arm was hanging numbed by his side, and that the

trooper was guiding his horse. He saw that they had saved him, and even in his deadly agony he was so far his own old courteous self, that he turned right and left to them, and thanked for what they had done for him.

But he had kept his eyes fixed on Hornby, for he saw that he was desperately hit, and he wanted to say one or two words to him before either of them died. Soon they were among English faces, and English cheers rang out in welcome to their return, but it was nothing to him; he kept his eye, which was growing dim, on Hornby, and, when he saw him fall off his saddle into the arms of a trooper, he dismounted too and staggered towards him.

The world seemed to go round and round, and he felt about him like a blind man. But he found Hornby somehow. A doctor, all scarlet and gold, was bending over him, and Charles knelt down on the other side and looked into the dying man's face.

"Do you know me, lieutenant?" he said, speaking thick like a drunken man, but determined to hold out; "you know your old servant, don't you?"

Hornby smiled as he recognised him, and said, "Ravenshoe." But then his face grew anxious, and he said, "Why did you hide yourself from me? You have ruined everything."

He could get no further for a minute, and then he said—

"Take this from round my neck and carry it to her. Tell her that you saw me die, and that I was true to our compact. Tell her that my share of our purification was complete, for I followed duty to death, as I promised her. She has a long life of weary penance before her to fulfil our bargain. Say I should wish her to be happy, only that I know she cannot be. And also say that I see now, that there is something better and more desirable than what we call happiness. I don't know what it is, but I suspect it is what we call duty."

Here the doctor said, "They are at it again, and I must go with them. I can do no good here for the poor dear fellow. Take what he tells you off his neck, in my presence, and let me go."

The doctor did it himself. When the great heavy gold stock was unbuttoned, Hornby seemed to breathe more freely. The doctor found round his neck a gold chain, from which hung a photograph of Ellen, and a black cross. He gave them to Charles, and departed.

Once more Charles spoke to Hornby. He said, "Where shall I find her?"

Hornby said, "Why, at Hackney, to be sure; did you not know she was there?" And afterwards, at the

very last, "Ravenshoe, I should have loved you; you are like her, my boy. Don't forget."

But Charles never heard that. They found Hornby dead and cold, with his head on Charles's lap, and Charles looked so like him that they said, "This man is dead too; let us bury him." But a skilful doctor there present, said, "This man is not dead, and will not die;" and he was right.

Oh, but the sabres bit deep that autumn afternoon! There were women in Minsk, in Moglef, in Tchernigof, in Jitemir, in Polimva, whose husbands were Hussars—and women in Taganrog, in Tcherkask, in Sanepta, which lies under the pleasant slate mountains, whose husbands and sons were Cossacks—who were made widows that day. For that day's work there was weeping in the reed-thatched hovels of the Don, and in the mud-built shanties of the Dnieper. For the 17th Lancers, the Scots Greys, the 1st Royals, and the 6th Enniskillens,—"these terrible beef-fed islanders" (to use the words of the *Northern Bee*)—were upon them; and Volhynia and Hampshire, Renfrewshire and Grodno, Podolia and Fermanagh, were mixed together in one common ruin.

Still, they say, the Princess Petrovitch, on certain days, leaves her carriage, and walks a mile through the snow barefoot, into Alexandroski, in memory of her

light-haired handsome young son, whom Hornby slew at Balaclava. And I myself know the place where Lady Allerton makes her pilgrimage for those two merry boys of hers who lie out on the Crimean hill. Alas! not side by side. Up and down in all weathers, along a certain gravel walk, where the chalk brook, having flooded the park with its dammed-up waters, comes foaming and spouting over a cascade, and hurries past between the smooth-mown lawns of the pleasance. In the very place where she stood when the second letter came. And there, they say, she will walk at times, until her beauty and her strength are gone, and her limbs refuse to carry her.

Karlin Karlinoff was herding strange-looking goats on the Suratow hill-side, which looks towards the melancholy Volga on one side, and the reedy Ural on the other, when the Pulk came back, and her son was not with them. Eliza Jones had got on her husband's smock frock, and was a-setting of beans, when the rector's wife came struggling over the heavy lands and water-furrows, and broke the news gently, and with many tears. Karlin Karlinoff drove her goats into the mud-walled yard that night; though the bittern in the melancholy fen may have been startled from his reeds by a cry more wild and doleful than his own; and Eliza Jones went on setting her beans, though they were watered with her tears.

What a strange wild business it was! The extreme east of Europe against the extreme west. Men without a word, an idea, a habit or a hope in common, thrown suddenly together, to fight and slay; and then to part, having learnt to respect one another better, in one year of war, than ever they had, in a hundred years of peace. Since that year we have understood Eylau and Borodino, which battles were a puzzle to some of us before that time. The French did better than we, which was provoking, because the curs began to bark—Spanish curs, for instance; American curs; the lower sort of French cur; and the Irish curs, who have the strange habit of barking the louder the more they are laughed at, and who, now, being represented by about two hundred men among six million, have rather a hard time of it. They barked louder, of course, at the Indian mutiny. But they have all got their tails between their legs now, and are likely to keep them there. We have had our lesson. We have learnt that what our fathers told us was true —that we are the most powerful nation on the face of the earth.

This, you will see, bears all upon the story I am telling you. Well, in a sort of way. Though I do not exactly see how. I could find a reason, if you gave me time. If you gave me time, I could find a reason for

anything. However, the result is this, that our poor Charles had been struck by a ball in the bone of his arm, and that the splinters were driven into the flesh, though the arm was not broken. It was a nasty business, said the doctors. All sorts of things might happen to him. Only one thing was certain, and that was that Charles Ravenshoe's career in the army was over for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

ARCHER'S PROPOSAL.

Six weeks had passed since the date of Captain Archer's letter before he presented himself in person at Casterton. They were weary weeks enough to Mary, Lord Saltire, and Lady Ascot. Lady Ascot was staying on at Casterton, as if permanently, at the earnest request of Lord and Lady Hainault; and she stayed on the more willingly that she and Mary might mingle their tears about Charles Ravenshoe, whom they were never to see again. The "previous marriage affair" had apparently fallen through utterly. All the advertisements, were they worded never so frantically, failed to raise to the surface the particular parish-clerk required; and Lady Ascot, after having propounded a grand scheme for personally inspecting every register in the United Kingdom, which was pooh-poohed by Lord Saltire, now gave up the matter as a bad job; and Lord Saltire himself began to be puzzled and

uneasy, and once more to wonder whether or no Maria was not mistaken after all. Mackworth was still very ill, though slowly recovering. The younger Tiernay, who was nursing him, reported that his head seemed entirely gone, although he began to eat voraciously, and, if encouraged, would take exercise. He would now walk far and fast, in silence, with the kind priest toiling after him. But his wilful feet always led him to the same spot. Whether they rambled in the park, whether they climbed the granite tors of the moor, or whether they followed the stream up through the woods, they always ended their walk at the same place—at the pool among the tumbled boulders, under the dark western headland, where Cuthbert's body had been found. And here the priest would sit looking seaward, as if his life and his intellect had come to a full stop here, and he was waiting patiently till a gleam of light should come from beyond.

William was at Ravenshoe, in full possession of the property. He had been born a gamekeeper's son, and brought up as a groom. He had now 10,000*l.* a year; and was going to marry the fisherman's daughter, his own true love; as beautiful, as sweet-tempered a girl as any in the three kingdoms. It was one of the most extraordinary rises in life that had ever taken place.

Youth, health, and wealth—they must produce happiness. Why no, not exactly in this case. He believed Charles was dead, and he knew, if that was the case, that the property was his; but he was not happy. He could not help thinking about Charles. He knew he was dead and buried, of course; but still he could not help wishing that he would come back, and that things might be again as they had been before. It is not very easy to analyse the processes of the mind of a man brought up as William was. Let us suppose that, having been taught to love and admire Charles above all earthly persons, his mind was not strong enough to disabuse himself of the illusion. I suppose that your African gets fond of his fetish. I take it that, if you stole his miserable old wooden idol in the night, though it might be badly carved, and split all up the back by the sun, and put in its place an Old Chelsea shepherdess, he would lament his graven image, and probably break the fifty guineas' worth of china with his club. I know this, however, that William would have given up his ten thousand a year, and have trusted to his brother's generosity, if he could have seen him back again. In barbarous, out-of-the-way places, like the west of Devonshire, the feudal feeling between foster-brothers is still absurdly strong. It is very ridiculous, of course. Nothing can be more ridiculous

or unnecessary than the lightning coming down the dining-room chimney and sending the fire-irons flying about the cat's ears. But there it is, and you must make the best of it.

We are now posted up well enough in the six weeks which preceded the arival of his mysterious Archer. He deferred his arrival till his honeymoon was completed. His mysterious letter to Mary partly alluded to his approaching marriage with Jane Blockstrop—daughter of Lieutenant Blockstrop of the coast guard, and niece of Rear-Admiral Blockstrop, who, as Captain Blockstrop, had the *Tartar* on the Australian station —and partly to something else. We shall see what directly. For, when Mary came down to see him in the drawing-room, there was with him, besides his wife, whom he introduced at once, a very tall and handsome young man, whom he presented to her as her cousin, George Corby.

Did Charles turn in his pallet at Scutari? Did he turn over and stare at the man in the next bed, who lay so deadly still, and who was gone when he woke on the weary morrow?

There was no mystery about George Corby's appearance. When Mary's father, Captain Corby, had gone to India, his younger brother, George's father, had gone to Australia. This younger brother was a somewhat

peevish, selfish man, and was not on the best of terms with Captain Corby. He heard, of course, of the wreck of the *Warren Hastings*, and the loss of his brother. He also informed himself that his niece was saved, and was the protected favourite of the Ravenshoes. He had then said to himself, "I am needy. I have a rising family. She is better off than I can make her. Let her stay there." And so let her stay there, keeping himself, however, to do him justice, pretty well informed of her position. He had made the acquaintance of Captain Archer, at Melbourne, on his first voyage to that port, in the end of 1852; laid the whole matter before him, and begged him not to break it to her at present. Captain Archer had readily promised to say nothing, for he saw Mary the lady of a great house, with every prospect, as he thought, of marrying the heir. But when he saw Mary, after the break-up, in Grosvenor Square, a nursery governess, he felt that he ought to speak, and set sail from the port of London with a full determination of giving a piece of his mind to her uncle, should he hesitate to acknowledge her. He had no need to say much. Mr. Corby, though a selfish, was not an unkind man, by any means. And, besides, he was now very wealthy, and perfectly able to provide for his niece. So, when Archer had finished his story, he merely

said, "I suppose I had better send over George to see if he will fall in love with her. That will be the best thing, I take it. She must not be a governess to those swells. They might slight or insult her. Take George over for me, will you, my dear soul, and see how it is likely to go. At all events, bring her back to me. Possibly I may not have done my duty by her."

George was called in from the rocking-chair in the verandah to receive instructions. He was, so his father told him, to go to Europe with Captain Archer, and, as Captain Archer was going to get married and miss a voyage, he might stay till he came back. First and foremost, he was to avail himself of his letters of introduction, and get into the good society that his father was able to command for him. Under this head of instruction he was to dance as much as possible, and to ride to the fox-hounds, taking care not to get too near to the hounds, or to rush at his fences like a madman, as all Australians did. Secondly, he was, if possible, to fall in love with his cousin Mary Corby, marry her, bring her back, and reside *pro tem.* at Tooralloorabyballycoomefoozleah, which station should be swept and garnished for his reception, until the new house at the Juggerugahugjug crossing-place was finished. Thirdly, he might run across to the Saxony ram sales, and, if he saw

anything reasonable, buy, but be careful of pink ears, for they wouldn't stand the Grampian frosts. Fourthly, he was not to smoke without changing his coat, or to eat the sugar when any one was looking. Fifthly, he was to look out for a stud horse, and might go as far as five hundred. Such a horse as Allow Me, Ask Mamma, or Pam's Mixture would do.[1] And so on, like the directions of the Aulic Council to the Archduke. He was not to go expressly to Durham; but, if he found himself in that part of the world, he might get a short-horned bull. He need not go to Scotland unless he liked; but, if he did, he might buy a couple of collies, &c. &c.

George attended the ram sales in Saxony, and just ran on to Vienna, thinking, with the philosophy of an Australian, that, if he *did* fall in love with his cousin, he might not care to travel far from her, and that therefore she might "keep." However, he came at last, when Archer had finished his honeymoon; and there he was in the drawing-room at Casterton.

[1] These names actually occur, side by side, in my newspaper (*The Field*) to which I referred for three names. They are in training by Henry Hall, at Hambleton, in Yorkshire. Surely men could find better names for their horses than such senseless ones as these. I would that was all one had to complain of. I hope the noble old sport is not on its last legs. But one trembles to think what will become of it, when the comparatively few high-minded men who are keeping things straight are gone.

Mary was not very much surprised when it was all put before her. She had said to Charles, in old times, "I know I have relations somewhere; when I am rich they will acknowledge me;" and, just for one instant, the suspicion crossed her mind that her relations might have heard of the fortune Lord Saltire had left her. It was unjust and impossible, and in an instant she felt it to be so. Possibly the consciousness of her injustice made her reception of her cousin somewhat warmer.

He was certainly very handsome and very charming. He had been brought up by his father the most punctilious dandy in the southern hemisphere, and thrown from a boy among the best society in the colony; so he was quite able to make himself at home everywhere. If there was a fault in his manner, it was that there was just a shade too much lazy ease in the presence of ladies. One has seen that lately, however, in other young gentlemen, not educated in the bush, to a greater extent; so we must not be hard upon him. When Lady Hainault and Lady Ascot heard that a cousin of Mary's had just turned up from the wilds of Australia, they looked at one another in astonishment, and agreed that he must be a wild man. But, when they had gone down and sat on him, as a committee of two, for an hour, they both pronounced him charming. And so he was.

Lord Hainault, on receiving this report, could do no less than ask him to stay a day or two. And so his luggage was sent for to Twyford, and the good Archer left, leaving him in possession.

Lord Saltire had been travelling round to all his estates. He had taken it into his head, about a month before this, that it was time that he should get into one of his great houses, and die there. He told Lady Ascot so, and advised her to come with him; but she still held on by Lord Charles Herries' children and Mary, and said she would wait. So he had gone away, with no one but his confidential servant. He had gone to Cottingdean first, which stands on the bank of the Wannet, at the foot of the North Hampshire mountains.

Well, Cottingdean did seem at first sight a noble lair for an old lion to crawl away to, and die in. There was a great mile-long elm avenue, carried, utterly regardless of economy, over the flat valley, across the innumerable branches of the river; and at the last the trees ran up over the first great heave of the chalk hill: and above the topmost boughs of those which stood in the valley, above the highest spire of the tallest poplar in the water-meadow, the old grey house hung aloft, a long irregular façade of stone. Behind were dark woods, and above all a pearl-green line of down.

But Cottingdean wouldn't do. His Lordship's man Simpson knew it wouldn't do from the first. There were draughts in Cottingdean, and doors that slammed in the night, and the armour in the great gallery used suddenly to go "clank" at all hours, in a terrible way. And the lady ancestress of the seventeenth century, who carried her head in a plate before her, used to stump upstairs and downstairs, from twelve o'clock to one, when she was punctually relieved from duty by the wicked old ancestor of the sixteenth century, who opened the cellar door and came rattling his sword against the banisters up all the stair-case till he got to the north-east tower, into which he went and slammed the door; and, when he had transacted his business, came clanking down again: when he in turn was relieved by an *οἱ πολλοὶ* of ghosts, who walked till cockcrow. Simpson couldn't stand it. No more could Lord Saltire, though possibly for different reasons than Simpson's.

The first night at Cottingdean Lord Saltire had his writing-desk unpacked, and took therefrom a rusty key. He said to Simpson, "You know where I am going. If I am not back in half an hour, come after me." Simpson knew where he was going. Lord Barkham had been staying here at Cottingdean just before he went up to town, and was killed in that unhappy duel. The old servants remembered that, when Lord Barkham went

away that morning, he had taken the key of his room with him, and had said, in his merry way, that no one was to go in there till he came back the next week, for he had left all his love-letters about. Lord Saltire had got the key, and was going to open the room the first time for forty years.

What did the poor old man find there? Probably nothing more than poor Barkham had said—some love-letters lying about. When the room was opened afterwards, by the new master of Cottingdean, we found only a boy's room, with fishing-rods and guns lying about. In one corner were a pair of muddy top-boots kicked off in a hurry, and an old groom remembered that Lord Barkham had been riding out the very morning he started for London. But, amidst the dust of forty years, we could plainly trace that some one had, comparatively recently, moved a chair up to the fire-place: and on the cold hearth there was a heap of the ashes of burnt paper.

Lord Saltire came back to Simpson just as his half-hour was over, and told him in confidence that the room he had been in was devilish draughty, and that he had caught cold in his ear. Cottingdean would not do after this. They departed next morning. They must try Marksworth.

Marksworth, Lord Saltire's north country place, is in

Cumberland. If you are on the top of the coach, going northward, between Hiltonsbridge and Copley Beck, you can see it all the way for three miles or more, over the stone walls. The mountains are on your left; to the right are endless unbroken level woodlands; and, rising out of them, two miles off, is a great mass of gray building, from the centre of which rises a square Norman keep, ninety feet high, a beacon for miles even in that mountainous country. The Hilton and Copley Beck join in the park, which is twelve miles in circumference, and nearly all thick woodland. Beyond the great tower, between it and the further mountains, you catch a gleam of water. This is Marksmere, in which there are charr.

The draughts at Marksworth were colder and keener than the draughts at Cottingdean. Lord Saltire always hated the place; for the truth is this, that although Marksworth looked as if it had stood for eight hundred years, every stone in it had been set up by his father, when he, Lord Saltire, was quite a big boy. It was beautifully done; it was splendidly and solidly built—probably the best-executed humbug in England; but it was not comfortable to live in. A nobleman of the nineteenth century, stricken in years, finds it difficult to accommodate himself in a house the windows of which are calculated to resist arrows. At the time

of the Eglinton tournament, Lord Saltire challenged the whole Tory world in arms, to attack Marksworth in the ante-gunpowder style of warfare; his Lordship to provide eatables and liquor to besiegers and besieged; probably hoping that he might get it burnt down over his head, and have a decent excuse for rebuilding it in a more sensible style. The challenge was not accepted. "The trouble," said certain Tory noblemen, of getting up the old tactics correctly would be very great; and the expense of having the old engines of war constructed would be enormous. Besides, it might come on to rain again, and spoil the whole affair."

Marksworth wouldn't do. And then Simpson suggested his lordship's town house in Curzon Street, and Lord Saltire said "Hey?" and Simpson repeated his suggestion, and Lord Saltire said "Hah!" As Charles's luck would have it, he liked the suggestion, and turned south, coming to Casterton on his way to London. He arrived at Casterton a few days after George Corby. When he alighted at the door, Lord Hainault ran down the steps to greet him, for this pair were very fond of one another. Lord Hainault, who was accused by some people of "priggishness," was certainly not priggish before Lord Saltire. He was genial and hearty. There was a slight crust on Lord Hainault. Because he had held his own among the clever commoners

at the university, he fancied himself a little cleverer than he was. He in his heart thought more of his second, than Marston did of his double first, and possibly showed it among his equals. But before an acknowledged superior, like Lord Saltire, this never showed. When Lord Saltire talked wisely and shrewdly (and who could do so better than he?), he listened; when Lord Saltire was cross, he laughed. On this occasion Lord Saltire was cross. He never was cross to any one but Lady Ascot, Lord Hainault, and Marston. He knew they liked it.

"Good Ged, Hainault," he began, "don't stand grinning there, and looking so abominably healthy and happy, or I will drive away again and go on to London. Nothing can be in worse taste than to look like that at a man whom you see is tired, and cold, and peevish. You have been out shooting, too. Don't deny it; you smell of gunpowder."

"Did you *never* shoot?" said Lord Hainault, laughing.

"I shot as long as I could walk, and therefore I have a right to nourish envy and all uncharitableness against those who can still do so. I wish you would be cross, Hainault. It is wretched manners not to be cross when you see a man is trying to put you out of temper."

"And how *are* you, my dear lad?" continued Lord Saltire, when he had got hold of his arm. "How is Lady Ascot? and whom have you got here?"

"We are all very well," said Lord Hainault; "and we have got nobody."

"Well done," said Lord Saltire. "I thought I should have found the house smelling like a poulterer's shop on Guy Fawkes's day, in consequence of your having got together all the hawbucks in the country for pheasant-shooting. I'll go upstairs, my dear boy, and change, and then come down to the library fire."

And so he did. There was no one there, and he sank into a comfortable chair with a contented "humph!" in front of the fire, beside a big round table. He had read the paper in the train; so he looked for a book. There was a book on the table beside him—Ruskin's "Modern Painters," which had pictures in it; so he took out his great gold glasses, and began turning it over.

A man's card fell from it. He picked it up and read it. "Mr. Charles Ravenshoe." Poor Charles! That spring, you remember, he had come over to see Adelaide, and, while waiting to see old Lady Hainault, had held his card in his hand. It had got into the book. Lord Saltire put the book away, put up his glasses, and walked to the window.

And Charles lay in his bed at Scutari and watched the flies upon the wall.

"I'll send up for little Mary," said Lord Saltire. "I want to see the little bird. Poor Charles!"

He looked out over the landscape. It was dull and foggy. He wandered into the convservatory, and idly looked out of the glass door at the end. Then, as he looked, he said, suddenly, "Gadzooks!" and then, still more briskly, "The deuce!"

There was a splendid show of chrysanthemums in the flower-garden, but they were not what his lordship exclaimed at. In the middle of the walk was Mary Corby, leaning on the arm of a very handsome young man. He was telling some very animated story, and she was looking up into his face with sparkling eyes.

"Othello and Desdemona! Death and confusion!" said Lord Saltire. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! Maria must be mad!"

He went back into the library. Lord Hainault was there. "Hainault," said he, quietly, "who is that young gentleman, walking with Mary Corby in the garden!"

"Oh! her cousin. I have not had time to tell you about it." Which he did.

"And what sort of fellow is he?" said Lord Saltire. "A Yahoo, I suppose."

"Not at all. He is a capital fellow—a perfect gentleman. There will be a match, I believe, unless you put a stop to it. You know best. We will talk it over. It seems to me to offer a good many advantages. I think it will come off in time. It is best for the poor little thing to forget poor Ravenshoe, if she can."

"Yes, it will be best for her to forget poor Ravenshoe, if she can," repeated Lord Saltire. "I wish her to do so. I must make the young fellow's acquaintance. By-the-by, what time does your post go out?"

"At five."

"Have you no morning post?"

"Yes. We can send to Henley before nine."

"Then I shall not plague myself with writing my letter now. I should like to see this young fellow, Hainault."

George Corby was introduced. Lord Saltire seemed to take a great fancy to him. He kept near him all the evening, and listened with great pleasure to his Australian stories. George Corby was, of course, very much flattered by such attention from such a famous man. Possibly he might have preferred to be near Mary; but old men, he thought, are exacting, and it is the duty of gentlemen to bear with them. So he stayed by him with good grace. After a time, Lord Saltire seemed to see that he had an intelligent listener. And

then the others were astonished to hear Lord Saltire do what he but seldom did for them—use his utmost powers of conversation; use an art almost forgotten, that of *talking*. To this young man, who was clever and well educated, and, like most "squatters," perhaps *a trifle* fond of hearing of great people, Lord Saltire opened the storehouse of his memory, of a memory extending over seventy years; and in a clear, well modulated voice, gave him his recollection of his interviews with great people—conversations with Sièyes, Talleyrand, with Madame de Staël, with Robespierre, with Egalité, with Alexander, and a dozen others. George was intensely eager to hear about Marat. Lord Saltire and his snuff-box had not penetrated into the lair of that filthy wolf, but he had heard much of him from many friends, and told it well. When the ladies rose to go to bed, George Corby was astonished; he had forgotten Mary, had never been near her the whole evening, and he had made an engagement to drive Lord Saltire the next morning up to Wargrave in a pony-chaise, to look at Barrymore House, and the place where the theatre stood, and where the game of high jinks had been played so bravely fifty years before. And, moreover, he and Lord Saltire were, the day after, to make an excursion down the river and see Medmenham, where once Jack Wilkes and the devil had held court.

Mary would not see much of him at this rate for a day or two.

It was a great shame of this veteran to make such a fool of the innocent young bushman. There ought to be fair play in love or war. His acquaintance Talleyrand, could not have been more crafty. I am so angry with him that I will give the letter he wrote that night *in extenso*, and show the world what a wicked old man he was. When he went to his room, he said to Simpson, "I have got to write a letter before I go to bed. I want it to go to the post at Henley before nine. I don't want it to lie in the letter-box in the hall. I don't want them to see the direction. What an appetite you would have for your breakfast, Simpson, if you were to walk to Henley." And Simpson said, "Very good, my Lord." And Lord Saltire wrote as follows:—

"MY DEAR LAD,—I have been travelling to my places, looking for a place to die in. They are all cold and draughty, and won't do. I have come back to Casterton. I must stay here at present on your account, and I am in mortal fear of dying here. Nothing, remember, can be more unmannerly or rude than falling ill, and dying, in another man's house. I know that I should resent such a proceeding myself as a deliberate affront, and I therefore would not do it for the world.

"You must come here to me *instantly;* do you hear? I am keeping the breach for you at all sacrifices. Until you come, I am to be trundled about this foggy valley in pony carriages through the day, and talk myself hoarse all the evening, all for your sake. A cousin of Mary Corby's has come from Australia. He is very handsome, clever, and gentlemanly, and I am afraid she is getting very fond of him.

"This must not be, my dear boy. Now our dear Charles is gone, you must, if possible, marry her. It is insufferable that we should have another disappointment from an interloper. I don't blame you for not having come before. You were quite right, but don't lose a moment now. Leave these boys of yours. The dirty little rogues must get on for a time without you. Don't think that I sneer at the noble work that you and your uncle are doing: God Almighty forbid; but you must leave it for a time, and come here.

"Don't argue or procrastinate, but come. I cannot go on being driven all over the country in November to keep him out of the way. Besides, if you don't come soon, I shall have finished all my true stories, and have to do what I have never done yet—to lie. So make haste, my dear boy.

"Yours affectionately,

"SALTIRE."

On the second day from this Lord Saltire was driven to Medmenham by George Corby, and prophesied to him about it. When they neared home, Lord Saltire grew distraught for the first time, and looked eagerly towards the terrace. As they drove up, John Marston ran down the steps to meet them. Lord Saltire said, "Thank God!" and walked up to the hall-door between the two young men.

"Are you staying in London?" said George Corby.

"Yes. I am living in London," said John Marston. "An uncle of mine, a Moravian missionary from Australia, is working at a large ragged school in the Borough, and I am helping him."

"You don't surely mean James Smith?" said Corby.

"Indeed I do."

"Your uncle? Well, that is very strange. I know him very well. My father fought his battle for him when he was at variance with the squatters about .... He is one of the best fellows in the world. I am delighted to make your acquaintance."

Lord Saltire said to Lord Hainault, when they were alone together,—"You see what a liberty I have taken, having my private secretary down in this unceremonious way. Do ask him to stay."

"You know how welcome he is for his own sake. Do you think you are right?"

"I think so."

"I am afraid you are a little too late," said Lord Hainault.

Alas! poor Charles.

CHAPTER VII.

SCUTARI.

ALAS! poor Charles. While they were all dividing the spoil at home, thinking him dead, where was he?

At Scutari. What happened to him before he got there, no one knows or ever will know. He does not remember, and there is no one else to tell. He was passed from hand to hand and put on board ship. Here fever set in, and he passed from a state of stupid agony into a state of delirium. He may have lain on the pier in the pouring rain, moistening his parched lips in the chilling shower; he may have been jolted from hospital to hospital, and laid in draughty passages, till a bed was found for him: as others were. But he happily knew nothing of it. Things were so bad with him now that it did not much matter how he was treated. Read Lord Sidney Osborne's "Scutari and its Hospitals," and see how he *might* have been, and probably was. It is no part of our duty to dig up and exhibit all that miserable

mismanagement. I think we have learnt our lesson. I think I will go bail it don't happen again. Before Charles knew where he was, there was a great change for the better. The hospital nurses arrived early in November.

He thinks that there were faint gleams of consciousness in his delirium. In the first, he says he was lying on his back, and above him were the masts and spars of a ship, and a sailor-boy was sitting out on a yard in the clear blue, mending a rope or doing something. It may have been a dream or not. Afterwards there were periods, distinctly remembered, when he seemed conscious—conscious of pain, and space, and time—to a certain extent. At these times he began to understand, in a way, that he was dead, and in hell. The delirium was better than this at ordinary times, in spite of its headlong incongruities. It was not so unbearable, save at times, when there came the feeling, too horrible for human brain to bear, of being millions and millions of miles, or of centuries, away, with no road back; at such times there was nothing to be done but to leap out of bed, and cry aloud for help in God's name.

Then there came a time when he began, at intervals, to see a great vaulted arch overhead, and to wonder whether or no it was the roof of the pit. He began, after studying the matter many times, to find that pain

had ceased, and that the great vaulted arch was real. And he heard low voices once at this time—blessed voices of his fellow-men. He was content to wait.

At last, his soul and consciousness seemed to return to him in a strange way. He seemed to pass out of some abnormal state into a natural one. For he became aware that he was alive; nay, more, that he was asleep, and dreaming a silly, pleasant dream, and that he could wake himself at any time. He awoke, expecting to awake in his old room at Ravenshoe. But he was not there, and looked round him in wonder.

The arch he remembered was overhead. That was real enough. Three people were round his bed—a doctor in undress, a grey-haired gentleman who peered into his face, and a lady.

"God bless me!" said the doctor. "We have fetched him through. Look at his eyes, just look at his eyes. As sane an eye as yours or mine, and the pulse as round as a button."

"Do you know us, my man?" said the gentleman.

It was possible enough that he did not, for he had never set eyes on him before. The gentleman meant only, "Are you sane enough to know your fellow-creatures when you see one?" Charles thought he must be some one he had met in society in old times and ought to recognise. He framed a polite reply, to the

effect that he hoped he had been well since he met him last, and that, if he found himself in the west, he would not pass Ravenshoe without coming to see him.

The doctor laughed. "A little abroad, still, I daresay; I have pulled you through. You have had a narrow escape."

Charles was recovered enough to take his hand and thank him fervently, and whispered, "Would you tell me one thing, sir? How did Lady Hainault come here?"

"Lady Hainault, my man?"

"Yes; she was standing at the foot of the bed."

"That is no Lady Hainault, my man; that is Miss Nightingale. Do you ever say your prayers?"

"No."

"Say them to-night before you go to sleep, and remember her name in them. Possibly they may get to heaven the quicker for it. Good-night."

Prayers forgotten, eh! How much of all this misery lay in that, I wonder? How much of this dull, stupid, careless despair—earth a hopeless, sunless wilderness, and heaven not thought of? Read on.

But, while you read, remember that poor Charles had had no domestic religious education whatever. The vicar had taught him his catechism and "his prayers." After that, Shrewsbury and Oxford. Read on, but don't condemn; at least not yet.

That he thanked God with all the earnestness of his warm heart that night, and remembered that name the doctor told him, you may be sure. But, when the prayer was finished, he began to think whether or no it was sincere, whether it would not be better that he should die, and that it should be all over and done. His creed was, that, if he died in the faith of Christ, bearing no ill will to anyone, having repented of his sins, it would not go ill with him. Would it not be better to die now that he could fulfil those conditions, and not tempt the horrible black future? Certainly.

In time he left watching the great arch overhead, and the creeping shadows, and the patch of light on the wall, which shaped itself into a faint rhomboid at noon, and crept on till it defined itself into a perfect square at sundown, and then grew golden and died out. He began to notice other things. But till the last there was one effect of light and shadow which he always lay awake to see—a faint flickering on the walls and roof, which came slowly nearer, till a light was in his eyes. We all know what that was. It has been described twenty times. I can believe that story of the dying man kissing the shadow on the wall. When Miss Nightingale and her lamp are forgotten, it will be time to consider whether one would prefer to turn Turk or Mormon.

He began to take notice that there were men in the

beds beside him. One, as we know, had been carried out dead; but there was another in his place now. And one day there was a great event; when Charles woke, both of them were up, sitting at the side of their beds, ghastly shadows, and talking across him.

The maddest musician never listened to the "vox humana" stop at Haarlem, with such delight as Charles did to these two voices. He lay for a time hearing them make acquaintance, and then he tried to sit up and join. He was on his left side, and tried to rise. His left arm would not support him, and he fell back, but they crept to him and set him up, and sat on his bed.

"Right again, eh, comrade?" said one. "I thought you was gone, my lad. But I heard the doctor say you'd get through. You look bravely. Time was when you used to jump out of bed, and cry on God A'mighty. Many a time I've strove to help ye. The man in *his* bed died while you was like that: a Fusilier Guards man. What regiment?"

"I am of the 140th," said Charles. "We had a bit of a brush with the enemy on the twenty-fifth. I was wounded there. It was a pretty little rattle, I think, for a time, but not of very much importance, I fancy."

The man who had first spoken laughed; the other man, a lad who had a round face once, perhaps, but which now was a pale death's head, with two great staring eyes,

speaking with a voice which Charles knew at once to be a gentleman's, said, "Don't you know then that that charge of yours is the talk of Europe? That charge will never be forgotten while the world is round. Six hundred men against ten battalions. Good God! And you might have died there, and not known it."

"Ah, is it so?" said Charles. "If some could only know it!"

"That is the worst of it," said the young man. "I have enlisted under a false name, and will never go home any more. Never more. And she will never know that I did my duty."

And after a time he got strong again in a way. A bullet, it appears, had struck the bone of his arm, and driven the splinters into the flesh. Fever had come on, and his splendid constitution, as yet untried, save by severe training, had pulled him through. But his left arm was useless. The doctor looked at it again and again, and shook his head.

The two men who were in the beds on each side of him were moved before him. They were only there a fortnight after his coming to himself. The oldest of the two went first, and two or three days after the younger.

The three made all sorts of plans for meeting in England. Alas, what chance is there for three soldiers

to meet again, unless by accident? At home it would have taken three years to have made these three men such hearty friends as they had become in a fortnight. Friendships are made in the camp, in the bush, or on board ship, at a wonderful rate. And, moreover, they last for an indefinite time. For ever, I fancy: for these reasons. Time does not destroy friendship. Time has nothing whatever to do with it. I have heard an old man of seventy-eight talking of a man he had not seen for twelve years, and before that for twenty-five, as if they were young men together. Craving for his company, as if once more they were together on the deck of the white-sailed yacht, flying before the easterly wind between Hurstcastle and Sconce Point. Mere continual familiarity, again, does not hurt friendship, unless interests clash. Diversity of interests is the death-blow of friendship. One great sacrifice may be made—two, or even three; but, after the first, two men are not to one another as they were before. Where men are thrown intimately together for a short time, and part have only seen the best side of one another, or where men see one another frequently, and have not very many causes of difference, friendship will flourish for ever. In the case of love it is very different, and for this obvious reason, which I will explain in a few pages if——

I entered into my own recognisances, in an early chapter of this story, not to preach. I fear they are escheated after this short essay on friendship, coming, as it does, exactly in the wrong place. I must only throw myself on the court, and purge myself of my contempt by promising amendment.

Poor Charles after a time was sent home to Fort Pitt. But that mighty left arm, which had done such noble work when it belonged to No. 3, in the Oxford University eight, was useless, and Charles Simpson, trooper in the 140th, was discharged from the army, and found himself on Christmas Eve in the street in front of the Waterloo Station, with eighteen shillings and ninepence in his pocket, wondering blindly what the end of it all would be, but no more dreaming of begging from those who had known him formerly than of leaping off Waterloo Bridge. Perhaps not half as much.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT CHARLES DID WITH HIS LAST EIGHTEEN SHILLINGS.

CHARLES' luck seemed certainly to have deserted him at last. And that is rather a serious matter, you see; for, as he had never trusted to anything but luck, it now follows that he had nothing left to trust to, except eighteen shillings and ninepence, and his little friend the cornet, who had come home invalided, and was living with his mother in Hyde Park Gardens. Let us hope, reader, that you and I may never be reduced to the patronage of a cornet of Hussars, and eighteen shillings in cash.

It was a fine frosty night, and the streets were gay and merry. It was a sad Christmas for many thousands; but the general crowd seemed determined not to think too deeply of these sad accounts which were coming from the Crimea just now. They seemed inclined to make Christmas Christmas, in spite of everything; and

perhaps they were right. It is good for a busy nation like the English to have two great festivals, and two only, the object of which every man who is a Christian can understand, and on these occasions to put in practice, to the best of one's power, the lesson of goodwill towards men which our Lord taught us. We English cannot stand too many saints' days. We decline to stop business for St. Blaize or St. Swithin; but we can understand Christmas and Easter. The foreign Catholics fiddle away so much time on saints' days that they are obliged to work like the Israelites in bondage on Sunday to get on at all. I have as good a right to prophesy as any other freeborn Englishman who pays rates and taxes; and I prophesy that, in this wonderful resurrection of Ireland, the attendance of the male population at Church on week-days will get small by degrees and beautifully less.

One man, Charles Ravenshoe, has got to spend his Christmas with eighteen shillings and a crippled left arm. There is half a million of money or so, and a sweet little wife, waiting for him if he would only behave like a rational being; but he will not, and must take the consequences.

He went westward, through a kind of instinct, and he came to Belgrave Square, where a certain duke lived. There were lights in the windows. The duke was in

office, and had been called up to town. Charles was glad of this; not that he had any business to transact with the duke, but a letter to deliver to the duke's coachman.

This simple circumstance saved him from being much nearer actual destitution than I should have liked to see him. The coachman's son had been wounded at Balaclava, and was still at Scutari, and Charles brought a letter from him. He got an English welcome, I promise you. And, next morning, going to Hyde Park Gardens, he found that his friend the cornet was out of town, and would not be back for a week. At this time the coachman became very useful. He offered him money, house-room, employment, everything he could possibly get for him; and Charles heartily and thankfully accepted house-room and board for a week.

At the end of a week he went back to Hyde Park Gardens. The cornet was come back. He had to sit in the kitchen while his message was taken upstairs. He merely sent up his name, said he was discharged, and asked for an interview.

The servants found out that he had been at the war in their young master's regiment, and they crowded round him full of sympathy and kindness. He was telling them how he had last seen the cornet in the thick of it on the terrible 25th, when they parted right

and left, and in dashed the cornet himself, who caught him by both hands.

"By gad, I'm so glad to see you. How you are altered without your moustache! Look you here, you fellows and girls, this is the man that charged up to my assistance when I was dismounted among the guns, and kept by me, while I caught another horse. What a cropper I went down, didn't I? What a terrible brush it was, eh? And poor Hornby, too! It is the talk of Europe, you know. You remember old Devna, and the galloping lizard, eh?"

And so on, till they got upstairs; and then he turned on him, and said, "Now, what are you going to do?"

"I have got eighteen shillings."

"Will your family do nothing for you?"

"Did Hornby tell you anything about me, my dear sir?" said Charles, eagerly.

"Not a word. I never knew that Hornby and you were acquainted till I saw you together when he was dying."

"Did you hear what we said to one another?"

"Not a word. The reason I spoke about your family is that no one, who had seen so much of you as I, could doubt that you were a gentleman. That is all. I am very much afraid I shall offend you—"

"That would not be easy, sir."

"Well, then, here goes. If you are utterly hard up, take service with me. There."

"I will do so with the deepest gratitude," said Charles. "But I cannot ride, I fear. My left arm is gone."

"Pish! ride with your right. It's a bargain. Come up and see my mother. I must show you to her, you know, because you will have to live here. She is deaf. Now you know the reason why the major used to talk so loud."

Charles smiled for an instant; he did remember that circumstance about the cornet's respected and gallant father. He followed the cornet upstairs, and was shown into the drawing-room, where sat a very handsome lady, about fifty years of age, knitting.

She was not only stone deaf, but had a trick of talking aloud, like the old lady in "Pickwick," under the impression that she was only thinking, which was a very disconcerting habit indeed. When Charles and the cornet entered the room, she said aloud, with amazing distinctness, looking hard at Charles, "God bless me! Who has he got now? What a fine gentlemanly-looking fellow. I wonder why he is dressed so shabbily." After which she arranged her trumpet, and prepared to go into action.

"This, mother," bawled the cornet, "is the man who saved me in the charge at Balaclava."

"Do you mean that that is trooper Simpson?" said she.

"Yes, mother."

"Then may the blessing of God Almighty rest upon your head!" she said to Charles. "The time will come, trooper Simpson, when you will know the value of a mother's gratitude. And when that time comes think of me. But for you, trooper Simpson, I might have been tearing my grey hair this day. What are we to do for him, James? He looks ill and worn. Words are not worth much. What shall we do?"

The cornet put his mouth to his mother's trumpet, and in an apologetic bellow, such as one gets from the skipper of a fruit brig, in the Bay of Biscay, O! when he bears up to know if you will be so kind as to oblige him with the longitude; roared out:

"He wants to take service with me. Have you any objection?"

"Of course not, you foolish boy," said she. "I wish we could do more for him than that." And then she continued in a tone slightly lowered, but perfectly audible, evidently under the impression that she was thinking to herself: "He is ugly, but he has a sweet face. I feel certain he is a gentleman who has had a difference with his family. I wish I could hear his

voice. God bless him! he looks like a valiant soldier. I hope he won't get drunk, or make love to the maids."

Charles had heard every word of this before he had time to bow himself out.

And so he accepted his new position with dull carelessness. Life was getting very worthless.

He walked across the park to see his friend, the coachman. The frost had given, and there was a dull dripping thaw. He leant against the railings at the end of the Serpentine. There was still a great crowd all round the water; but up the whole expanse there were only four skaters, for the ice was very dangerous and rotten, and the people had been warned off. One of the skaters came sweeping down to within a hundred yards of where he was—a reckless, headlong skater, one who would chance drowning to have his will. The ice cracked every moment and warned him, but he would not heed, till it broke, and down he went; clutching wildly at the pitiless, uptilted slabs which clanked about his head, to save himself; and then with a wild cry disappeared. The icemen were on the spot in a minute; and, when five were past, they had him out, and bore him off to the receiving-house. A gentleman, a doctor apparently, who stood by Charles, said to him, "Well, there is a reckless fool gone to his account, God forgive him!"

"They will bring him round, won't they?" said Charles.

"Ten to one against it," said the doctor. "What right has he to calculate on such a thing, either? Why, most likely there will be half a dozen houses in mourning for that man to-morrow. He is evidently a man of some mark. I can pity his relations in their bereavement, sir, but I have precious little pity for a reckless fool."

And so Charles began to serve his friend, the cornet, in a way—a very poor way, I fear, for he was very weak and ill, and could do but little. The deaf lady treated him like a son, God bless her; but Charles could not recover the shock of his fever and delirium in the Crimea. He grew very low-spirited and despondent by day, and, worst of all, he began to have sleepless nights—terrible nights. In the rough calculation he had made of being able to live through his degradation, and get used to it, he had calculated, unwittingly, on perfect health. He had thought that in a few years he should forget the old life, and become just like one of the grooms he had made his companions. This had now become impossible, for his health and his nerve were gone.

He began to get afraid of his horses; that was the first symptom. He tried to fight against the convic-

tion, but it forced itself upon him. When he was on horseback, he found that he was frightened when anything went wrong; his knees gave way on emergency, and his hand was irresolute. And, what is more, be sure of this, that, before he confessed the fact to himself, the horses had found it out, and "taken action on it," or else, may I ride a donkey, with my face towards the tail, for the rest of my life.

And he began to see another thing. Now, when he was nervous, in ill health, and whimsical, the company of men among whom he was thrown as fellow-servants became nearly unbearable. Little trifling acts of coarseness, unnoticed when he was in good health and strong, at the time he was with poor Hornby, now disgusted him. Most kind-hearted young fellows, brought up as he had been, are apt to be familiar with, and probably pet and spoil, the man whose duty it is to minister to their favourite pleasures, be he gamekeeper or groom, or cricketer, or waterman. Nothing can be more natural, or, in proper bounds, harmless. Charles had thought that, being used to these men, he could live with them and do as they did. For a month or two, while in rude coarse health, he found it was possible; for had not Lord Welter and he done the same thing for amusement? But now, with shattered nerves, he found it intolerable. I have had great opportunities

of seeing gentlemen trying to do this sort of thing—I mean in Australia—and, as far as my experience goes, it ends in one of two ways. Either they give it up as a bad job, and assume the position that superior education gives them, or else they take to drink, and go, not to mince matters, to the devil.

What Charles did, we shall see. Nobody could be more kind and affectionate than the cornet and his deaf mother. They guessed that he was "somebody," and that things were wrong with him; though, if he had been a chimney-sweep's son, it would have made no difference to them, for they were "good people." The cornet once or twice invited his confidence; but he was too young, and Charles had not the energy to tell him anything. His mother, too, asked him to tell her if anything was wrong in his affairs, and whether she could help him; and possibly he might have been more inclined to confide in her, than in her son. But who could bellow such a sad tale of misery through an ear-trumpet? He held his peace.

He kept Ellen's picture, which he had taken from Hornby. He determined he would not go and seek her. She was safe somewhere, in some Catholic asylum. Why should he re-open her grief?

But life was getting very, very weary business. By day, his old favourite pleasure of riding had become a

terror, and at night he got no rest. Death forty good years away, by all calculation. A weary time.

He thought himself humbled, but he was not. He said to himself that he was prevented from going back, because he had found out that Mary was in love with him, and also because he was disgraced through his sister; and both of these reasons were, truly, most powerful with him. But, in addition to this, I fear there was a great deal of obstinate pride, which thing is harder to beat out of a man than most things.

And now, after all this half-moralizing narrative, an important fact or two. The duke was very busy, and stayed in town, and, as a consequence, the duke's coachman. Moreover, the duke's coachman's son came home invalided, and stayed with his father; and Charles, with the hearty approval of the cornet, used to walk across the park every night to see him, and talk over the campaign, and then look in at the Servants' Club, of which he was still a member. And the door of the Servants' Club room had glass windows to it. And I have noticed that anybody who looks through a glass window (under favourable circumstances) can see who is on the other side. I have done it myself more than once.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NORTH SIDE OF GROSVENOR SQUARE.

JOHN Marston's first disappointment in life had been his refusal by Mary. He was one of those men, brought up in a hard school, who get, somehow, the opinion that everything which happens to a man is his own fault. He used to say that every man who could play whist could get a second if he chose. I have an idea that he is in some sort right. But he used to carry this sort of thing to a rather absurd extent. He was apt to be hard on men who failed, and to be always the first to say, "If he had done this, or left that alone, it would not have been so," and he himself, with a calm clear brain and perfect health, had succeeded in everything he had ever tried at, even up to a double first. At one point he was stopped. He had always given himself airs of superiority over Charles, and had given him advice, good as it was, in a way which would have ruined his influence with nine men out of ten; and suddenly he was brought up. At the most important point in life, he found

Charles his superior. Charles had won a woman's love without knowing it, or caring for it; and he had tried for it, and failed.

John Marston was an eminently noble and high-minded man. His faults were only those of education, and his faults were very few. When he found himself rejected, and found out why it was so—when he found that he was no rival of Charles, and that Charles cared naught for poor Mary—he humbly set his quick brain to work to find out in what way Charles, so greatly his inferior in intellect, was superior to him in the most important of all things. For he saw that Charles had not only won Mary's love, but the love of every one who knew him: whereas he, John Marston, had but very few friends.

And, when he once set to work at this task, he seemed to come rapidly to the conclusion that Charles was superior to him in everything except application. "And how much application should I have had," he concluded, "if I had not been a needy man?"

So you see that his disappointment cured him of what was almost his only vice—conceit. Everything works together for good, for those who are really good.

Hitherto, John Marston had led only the life that so many young Englishmen lead—a life of study, combined with violent, objectless, physical exertion, as a counter-

poise. He had never known what enthusiasm was as yet. There was a vast deal of it somewhere about him; in his elbows, or his toes, or the calves of his legs, or somewhere, as events prove. If I might hazard an opinion, I should say that it was stowed away somewhere in that immensely high, but somewhat narrow forehead of his. Before he tried love-making, he might have written the calmest and most exasperating article in the *Saturday Review*. But, shortly after that, the tinder got a-fire; and the man who set it on fire was his uncle Smith, the Moravian missionary.

For this fellow, Smith, had, as we know, come home from Australia with the dying words of his beautiful wife ringing in his ears: "Go home from here, my love, into the great towns, and see what is to be done there." And he had found his nephew, John Marston. And, while Marston listened to his strange wild conversation, a light broke in upon him. And what had been to him merely words before this, now became glorious, tremendous realities.

And so those two had gone hand in hand down into the dirt and the profligacy of Southwark, to do together a work the reward of which comes after death. There are thousands of men at such work now. We have no more to do with it than to record the fact, that these two were at it heart and hand.

John Marston's love for Mary had never waned for one instant. When he had found that, or thought he had found that, she loved Charles, he had in a quiet, dignified way, retired from the contest. He had determined that he would go away and work at ragged schools, and so on, and try to forget all about her. He had begun to fancy that his love was growing cool, when Lord Saltire's letter reached him, and set it all a-blaze again.

This was unendurable — that a savage, from the southern wilds, should step in like this, without notice. He posted off to Casterton.

Mary was very glad to see him; but he had proposed to her once, and, therefore, how could she be so familiar with him as of yore? Notwithstanding this, John was not so very much disappointed at his reception; he had thought that matters were even worse than they were.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, he watched them together. George Corby was evidently in love. He went to Mary, who was sitting alone, the moment they came from the dining-room. Mary looked up, and caught his eyes as she approached; but her eyes wandered from him to the door, until they settled on John himself. She seemed to wish that he would come and talk to her. He had a special reason for not doing so;

he wanted to watch her and George together. So he stayed behind, and talked to Lord Hainault.

Lord Saltire moved up beside Lady Ascot. Lady Hainault had the three children—Archy in her lap, and Gus and Flora beside her. In her high and mighty way, she was amusing them, or rather trying to do so. Lady Hainault was one of the best and noblest women in the world, as you have seen already; but she was not an amusing person. And no one knew it better than herself. Her intentions were excellent: she wanted to leave Mary free from the children until their bed-time, so that she might talk to her old acquaintance, John Marston; for, at the children's bed-time, Mary would have to go with them. Even Lady Hainault, determined as she was, never dared to contemplate putting those children to bed without Mary's assistance. She was trying to tell them a story out of her own head, but was making a dreadful mess of it; and she was quite conscious that Gus and Flora were listening to her with contemptuous pity.

So they were disposed. Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot were comfortably out of hearing. We had better attend to them first, and come round to the others afterwards.

Lady Ascot began. "James," she said, "it is perfectly evident to me that you sent for John Marston."

"Well, and suppose I did?" said Lord Saltire.

"Well, then, why did you do so?"

"Maria," said Lord Saltire, "do you know that sometimes you are intolerably foolish? Cannot you answer that question for yourself?"

"Of course I can," said Lady Ascot.

"Then why the deuce did you ask me?"

That was a hard question to answer, but Lady Ascot said:

"I doubt if you are wise, James. I believe it would be better that she should go to Australia. It is a very good match for her."

"It is not a good match for her," said Lord Saltire, testily. "To begin with, first cousin marriages are an invention of the devil. Third and lastly, she sha'n't go to that infernal hole. Sixthly, I want her, now our Charles is dead, to marry John Marston; and, in conclusion, I mean to have my own way."

"Do you know," said Lady Ascot, "that he proposed to her before, and was rejected?"

"He told me of it the same night," said Lord Saltire. "Now, don't talk any more nonsense, but tell me this, Is she bitten with that young fellow?"

"Not deeply, as yet, I think," said Lady Ascot.

"Which of them has the best chance?" said Lord Saltire.

"James," said Lady Ascot, repeating his own words,

"do you know that sometimes you are intolerably foolish? How can I tell?"

"Which would you bet on, Miss Headstall?" asked Lord Saltire.

"Well! well!" said Lady Ascot, "I suppose I should bet on John Marston."

"And how long are you going to give Sebastopol, Lord Hainault?" said John Marston.

"What do you think about the Greek Kalends, my dear Marston?" said Lord Hainault.

"Why, no. I suppose we shall get it at last. It won't do to have it said that England and France—"

"Say France and England just now," said Lord Hainault.

"No, I will not. It must not be said that England and France could not take a Black Sea fortress."

"We shall have to say it, I fear," said Lord Hainault. "I am not quite sure that we English don't want a thrashing."

"I am sure we do," said Marston. "But we shall never get one. That is the worst of it."

"My dear Marston," said Lord Hainault, "you have a clear head. Will you tell me this? Do you believe that Charles Ravenshoe is dead?"

"God bless me, Lord Hainault, have you any doubts?"

"Yes."

"So have I," said Marston, turning eagerly towards him. "I thought you had all made up your minds. If there is any doubt, ought we not to mention it to Lord Saltire?"

"I think that he has doubts himself. I may tell you that he has secured to him, in case of his return, eighty thousand pounds."

"He would have made him his heir, I suppose," said John Marston; "would he not?"

"Yes; I think I am justified in saying yes."

"And so all the estates go to Lord Ascot in any case?"

"Unless in case of Charles's reappearance before his death; in which case, I believe he would alter his will."

"Then, if Charles be alive, he had better keep out of Lord Ascot's way on dark nights, in narrow lanes," said John Marston.

"You are mistaken there," said Lord Hainault, thoughtfully. "Ascot is a bad fellow. I told him so once in public, at the risk of getting an awful thrashing. If it had not been for Mainwaring, I should have had sore bones for a twelvemonth. But—but—well, I was at Eton with Ascot, and Ascot was and is a great blackguard. But, do you know, he is to some a very affectionate fellow. You know he was adored at Eton."

"He was not liked at Oxford," said Marston. "I never knew any good of him. He is a great rascal."

"Yes," said Lord Hainault, "I suppose he is what you would call a great rascal. Yes; I told him so, you know. And I am not a fighting man, and that proves that I was strongly convinced of the fact, or I should have shirked my duty. A man in my position don't like to go down to the House of Lords with a black eye. But I doubt if he is capable of any deep villany yet. If you were to say to me that Charles would be unwise to allow Ascot's wife to make his gruel for him, I should say that I agreed with you."

"There you are certainly right, my lord," said John Marston, smiling. "But I never knew Lord Ascot spare either man or woman."

"That is very true," said Lord Hainault. "Do you notice that we have been speaking as if Charles Ravenshoe were not dead?"

"I don't believe he is," said John Marston.

"Nor I, do you know," said Lord Hainault; "at least only half. What a pair of ninnies we are. Only ninety men of the 140th came out of that Balaclava charge. If he escaped the cholera, the chances are in favour of his having been killed there."

"What evidence have we that he enlisted in that regiment at all?"

"Lady Hainault's and Mary's description of his uniform, which they never distinctly saw for one moment," said Lord Hainault. "*Voilà tout.*"

"And you would not speak to Lord Saltire?"

"Why, no. He sees all that we see. If he comes back, he gets eighty thousand pounds. It would not do either for you or me to press him to alter his will. Do you see?"

"I suppose you are right, Lord Hainault. Things cannot go very wrong either way. I hope Mary will not fall in love with that cousin of hers," he added, with a laugh.

"Are you wise in persevering, do you think?" said Lord Hainault, kindly.

"I will tell you in a couple of days," said John Marston. "Is there any chance of seeing that best of fellows, William Ravenshoe, here?"

"He may come tumbling up. He has put off his wedding in consequence of the death of his half-brother. I wonder if he was humbugged at Varna."

"Nothing more likely," said Marston. "Where is Lord Welter?"

"In Paris—plucking geese."

Just about this time all the various groups in the drawing-room seemed to come to the conclusion that a time had arrived for new combinations, to avoid remarks.

So there was a regular puss-in-the-corner business. John Marston went over to Mary; George Corby came to Lord Hainault; Lord Saltire went to Lady Hainault, who had Archy asleep in her lap; and Gus and Flora went to Lady Ascot.

"At last, old friend," said Mary to John Marston. "And I have been watching for you so long. I was afraid that the time would come for the children to go to bed, and that you would never come and speak to me."

"Lord Hainault and I were talking politics," said Marston. "That is why I did not come."

"Men must talk politics, I suppose," said Mary. "But I wish you had come while my cousin was here. He is so charming. You will like him."

"He seems to be a capital fellow," said Marston.

"Indeed he is," said Mary. "He is really the most loveable creature I have met for a long time. If you would take him up, and be kind to him, and show him life, from the side from which *you* see it, you would be doing a good work. And you would be obliging *me*. And I know, my dear friend, that you like to oblige me."

"Miss Corby, you know that I would die for you."

"I know it. Who better? It puzzles me to know what I have done to earn such kindness from you. But there it is. You will be kind to him."

Marston was partly pleased, and partly disappointed by this conversation. Would you like to guess why? Yes. Then I will leave you to do so, and save myself half a page of writing.

Only saying this, for the benefit of inexperienced novel-readers, that he was glad to hear her talk in that free and easy manner about her cousin; but would have been glad if she had not talked in that free and easy manner to himself. Nevertheless, there was evidently no harm done as yet. That was a great cause of congratulation; there was time yet.

Gus and Flora went over to Lady Ascot. Lady Ascot said, "My dears, is it not near bed-time?" just by way of opening the conversation—nothing more.

"Lawks a mercy me, no," said Flora. "Go along with you, do, you foolish thing."

"My dear! my dear!" said Lady Ascot.

"She is imitating old Alwright," explained Gus. "She told me she was going to. Lord Saltire says, Maria! Maria! Maria!—you are intolerably foolish, Maria!"

"Don't be naughty, Gus," said Lady Ascot.

"Well, so he did, for I heard him. Don't mind us; we don't mean any harm. I say, Lady Ascot, has she any right to bite and scratch?"

"Who?" said Lady Ascot.

"Why, that Flora. She bit Alwright because she wouldn't lend her Mrs. Moko."

"Oh! you dreadful fib," said Flora. "Oh! you wicked boy, you know where you'll go to if you tell such stories. Lady Ascot, I didn't bite her; I only said she ought to be bit. She told me that she couldn't let me have Mrs. Moko, because she was trying caps on her. And then she told nurse that I should never have her again, because I squeezed her flat. And so she told a story. And it was not I who squeezed her flat, but that boy, who is worse than Ananias and Sapphira. I made a bogy of her in the nursery door, with a broom and a counterpane, just as he was coming in. And he shut the door on her head and squeezed a piece of paint off her nose as big as half a crown."

Lady Ascot was relieved by being informed that the Mrs. Moko, aforesaid, was only a pasteboard image, the size of life, used by the lady's maid for fitting caps.

There were many evenings like this; a week or so was passed without any change. At last, there was a move towards London.

The first who took flight was George Corby. He was getting dissatisfied, in his sleepy semi-tropical way, with the state of affairs. It was evident that, since John Marston's arrival, he had been playing, with regard to Mary, second fiddle (if you can possibly be

induced to pardon the extreme coarseness of the expression). One day, Lord Saltire asked him to take him for a drive. They went over to dismantled Ranford, and Lord Saltire was more amusing than ever. As they drove up through the dense larch plantation, on the outskirt of the park, they saw Marston and Mary side by side. George Corby bit his lip.

"I suppose there is something there, my lord?" said he.

"Oh dear, yes; I hope so," said Lord Saltire. "Oh, yes, that is a very old affair."

So George Corby went first. He did not give up all hopes of being successful, but he did not like the way things were going. His English expedition was not quite so pleasant as he intended it to be. He, poor fellow, was desperately in love, and his suit did not seem likely to prosper. He was inclined to be angry with Lord Saltire. He should not have let things go so far, thought George, without letting him know; quite forgetting that the mischief was done before Lord Saltire's arrival.

Lord Saltire and John Marston moved next. Lord Saltire had thought it best to take his man Simpson's advice, and move into his house in Curzon Street. He had asked John to come with him.

"It is a very nice little house," he said; "deuced

well aired, and that sort of thing; but I know I shall have a creeping in my back when I go back for the first week, and fancy there is a draught. This will make me peevish. I don't like to be peevish to my servants, because it is unfair; they can't answer one. I wish you would come and let me be peevish to you. You may just as well. It will do you good. You have got a fancy for disciplining yourself, and all that sort of thing; and you will find me capital practice for a week or so, in a fresh house. After that I shall get amiable, and then you may go. You may have the use of my carriage, to go and attend to your poor man's plaster business in Southwark, if you like. I am not nervous about fever or vermin. Besides, it may amuse me to hear all about it. And you can bring that cracked uncle of yours to see me sometimes; his Scriptural talk is very piquant."

Lord and Lady Hainault moved up into Grosvenor Square, too, for Parliament was going to meet rather early. They persuaded Lady Ascot to come and stay with them.

After a few days, William made his appearance. "Well, my dear Ravenshoe," said Lord Hainault, "and what brings you to town?"

"I don't know," said William. "I cannot stay down there. Lord Hainault, do you know that I think I am going cracked."

"Why, my dear fellow, what do you mean?"

"I have got such a strange fancy in my head, I cannot rest."

"What is your fancy?" said Lord Hainault. "Stay; may I make a guess at it?"

"You would never dream what it is. It is too mad."

"I will guess," said Lord Hainault. "Your fancy is this:—You believe that Charles Ravenshoe is alive, and you have come up to London to take your chance of finding him in the streets."

"But, good God!" said William, "how have you found this out? I have never told it even to my own sweetheart."

"Because," said Lord Hainault, laying his hand on his shoulder, "I and John Marston have exactly the same fancy. That is why."

And Charles so close to them all the time. Creeping every day across the park to see the coachman and his son. Every day getting more hopeless. All energy gone. Wit enough left to see that he was living on the charity of the cornet. There were some splinters in his arm which would not come away, and kept him restless. He never slept now. He hesitated when he was spoken to. Any sudden noise made him start and look wild. I will not go on with the symptoms. Things were much worse with him than we have ever seen them

before. He, poor lad, began to wonder whether it would come to him to die in a hospital, or—

Those cursed bridges! Why did they build such things? Who built them? The devil. To tempt ruined desperate men, with ten thousand fiends gnawing and sawing in their deltoid muscles, night and day. Suppose he had to cross one of these by night, would he ever get to the other side? Or would angels from heaven come down and hold him back?

The cornet and his mother had a conversation about him. Bawled the cornet into the ear-trumpet:

"My fellow Simpson is very bad, mother. He is getting low and nervous, and I don't like the looks of him."

"I remarked it myself," said the old lady. "We had better have Bright. It would be cheaper to pay five guineas, and get a good opinion at once."

"I expect he wants a surgeon more than a doctor," said the cornet.

"Well, that is the doctor's business," said the old lady. "Drop a line to Bright, and see what he says. It would be a burning shame, my dear—enough to bring down the wrath of God upon us—if we were to let him want for anything, as long as we have money. And we have plenty of money. More than we want. And if it annoys him to go near the horses, we must pension

him. But I would rather let him believe that he was earning his wages, because it might be a weight on his mind if we did not. See to it the first thing in the morning. Remember Balaclava, John! Remember Balaclava! If you forget Balaclava, and what trooper Simpson did for you there, you are tempting God to forget you."

"I hope he may when I do, mother," shouted the cornet. "I remember Balaclava—ay, and Devna before."

There are such people as these in the world, reader. I know some of them. I know a great many of them. So many of them, in fact, that this conclusion has been forced upon me—that the world is *not* entirely peopled by rogues and fools; nay, more, that the rogues and fools form a contemptible minority. I may become unpopular, I may be sneered at by men who think themselves wiser, for coming to such a conclusion; but I will not retract what I have said. The good people in the world outnumber the bad, ten to one, and the ticket for this sort of belief is "Optimist."

This conversation between the cornet and his mother took place at half-past two. At that time Charles had crept across the park to the Mews, near Belgrave Square, to see his friend the duke's coachman and his son. May I be allowed, without being accused of writing a novel

in the "confidential style," to tell you, that this is the most important day in the whole story.

At half-past two, William Ravenshoe called at Lord Hainault's house in Grosvenor Square. He saw Lady Ascot. Lady Ascot asked him what sort of weather it was out of doors.

William said that there was a thick fog near the river, but that on the north side of the square it was pleasant. So Lady Ascot said she would like a walk, if it were only for ten minutes, if he would give her his arm; and out they went.

Mary and the children came out too, but they went into the square. Lady Ascot and William walked slowly up and down the pavement alone, for Lady Ascot liked to see the people.

Up and down the north side, in front of the house. At the second turn, when they were within twenty yards of the west end of the square, a tall man with an umbrella over his shoulder came round the corner, and leant against the lamp-post. They both knew him in an instant. It was Lord Ascot. He had not seen them. He had turned to look at a great long-legged chesnut that was coming down the street, from the right, with a human being on his back. The horse was desperately vicious, but very beautiful and valuable. The groom on his back was neither beautiful nor valuable, and was

losing his temper with the horse. The horse was one of those horses vicious by nature—such a horse as Rarey (all honour to him) can terrify into submission for a short time; and the groom was a groom, not one of our country lads, every one of whose virtues and vices have been discussed over and over again at the squire's dinner-table, or about whom the rector has scratched his head, and had into his study for private exhortation or encouragement. Not one of the minority. One of the majority, I very much fear. Reared like a dog among the straw, without education, without religion, without self-respect—worse broke than the horse he rode. When I think of all that was said against grooms and stable-helpers during the Rarey fever, I get very angry, I confess it. One man said to me, "When we have had a groom or two killed, we shall have our horses treated properly." Look to your grooms, gentlemen, and don't allow such a blot on the fair fame of England as some racing stables much longer, or there will be a heavy reckoning against you when the books are balanced.

But the poor groom lost his temper with the horse, and beat it over the head. And Lord Ascot stayed to say, "D—— it all, man, you will never do any good like that;" though a greater fiend on horseback than Lord Ascot I never saw.

This gave time for Lady Ascot to say, "Come on, my dear Ravenshoe, and let us speak to him." So on they went. Lord Ascot was so busy looking at the horse and groom, that they got close behind him before he saw them. Nobody being near, Lady Ascot, with a sparkle of her old fun, poked him in the back with her walking-stick. Lord Ascot turned sharply and angrily round, with his umbrella raised for a blow.

When he saw who it was, he burst out into a pleasant laugh. "Now, you grandma," he said, "you keep that old stick of yours quiet, or you'll get into trouble. What do you mean by assaulting the head of the house in the public streets? I am ashamed of you. You, Ravenshoe, you egged her on to do it. I shall have to punch your head before I have done. How are you both?"

"And where have you been, you naughty boy?" said Lady Ascot.

"At Paris," said that ingenuous nobleman, "dicing and brawling as usual. Nobody can accuse me of hiding *my* talents in a napkin, grandma. Those two things are all I am fit for, and I certainly do them with a will. I have fought a duel, too. A Yankee Doodle got it into his head that he might be impertinent to Adelaide; so I took him out and shot him. Don't cry, now. He is not dead. He'll walk lame though, I fancy, for a time. How jolly it is to catch you out here. I dread meeting

that insufferable prig, Hainault, for fear I should kick him. Give me her arm, my dear Ravenshoe."

"And where is Adelaide?" said Lady Ascot.

"Up at St. John's Wood," said he. "Do steal away, and come and see her. Grandma, I was very sorry to hear of poor Charles' death—I was indeed. You know what it has done for me; but, by Gad, I was very sorry."

"Dear Welter—dear Ascot," said Lady Ascot, "I am sure you were sorry. Oh! if you would repent, my own dear. If you would think of the love that Christ bore you when He died for you. Oh Ascot, Ascot! will nothing save you from the terrible hereafter?"

"I am afraid not, grandma," said Lord Ascot. "It is getting too cold for you to stay out. Ravenshoe, my dear fellow, take her in."

And so, after a kind good-bye, Lord Ascot walked away towards the south-west.

I am afraid that John Marston was right. I am afraid he spoke the truth when he said that Lord Ascot was a savage, untameable blackguard.

CHAPTER X.

LORD ASCOT'S CROWNING ACT OF FOLLY.

LORD ASCOT, with his umbrella over his shoulder, swung on down the street, south-westward. The town was pleasant in the higher parts, and so he felt inclined to prolong his walk. He turned to the right into Park Lane.

He was a remarkable-looking man. So tall, so broad, with such a mighty chest, and such a great, red, hairless, cruel face above it, that people, when he paused to look about him, as he did at each street corner, turned to look at him. He did not notice it; he was used to it. And, besides, as he walked there were two or three words ringing yet in his ears which made him look less keenly than usual after the handsome horses and pretty faces which he met in his walk.

"Oh, Ascot, Ascot! will nothing save you from the terrible hereafter?"

"Confound those old women, more particularly when

they take to religion. Always croaking. And grandma Ascot, too, as plucky and good an old soul as any in England—as good a judge of a horse as William Day—taking to that sort of thing. Hang it! it was unendurable. It was bad taste, you know, putting such ideas into a fellow's head. London was dull enough after Paris, without that."

So thought Lord Ascot, as he stood in front of Dudley House, and looked southward. The winter sun was feebly shining where he was, but to the south there was a sea of fog, out of which rose the Wellington statue, looking more exasperating than ever, and the two great houses at the Albert Gate.

"This London is a beastly hole," said he. "I have got to go down into that cursed fog. I wish Tattersalls' was anywhere else." But he shouldered his umbrella again, and on he went.

Opposite St. George's Hospital there were a number of medical students. Two of them, regardless of the order which should always be kept on her Majesty's highway, were wrestling. Lord Ascot paused for a moment to look at them. He heard one of the students who were looking on say to another, evidently about himself:

"By Gad! what preparations that fellow would cut up into."

"Ah!" said another, "and wouldn't he cuss and d—— under operation neither."

"I know who that is," said a third. "That's Lord Ascot; the most infernal, headlong, gambling savage in the three kingdoms."

So Lord Ascot, in the odour of sanctity, passed down into Tattersalls' yard. There was no one in the rooms. He went out into the yard again.

"Hullo, you sir! Have you seen Mr. Sloane?"

"Mr. Sloane was here not ten minutes ago, my lord. He thought your lordship was not coming. He is gone down to the Groom's Arms."

"Where the deuce is that?"

"In Chapel Street, at the corner of the mews, my lord. Fust turning on the right, my lord."

Lord Ascot had business with our old acquaintance Mr. Sloane, and went on. When he came to the public-house mentioned (the very same one in which the Servants' Club was held, to which Charles belonged), he went into the bar, and asked of a feeble-minded girl, left accidentally in charge of the bar—"Where was Mr. Sloane?" And she said, "Upstairs, in the club-room."

Lord Ascot walked up to the club-room, and looked in at the glass door. And there he saw Sloane. He was standing up, with his hand on a man's shoulder,

who had a map before him. Right and left of these two men were two other men, an old one and a young one, and the four faces were close together; and while he watched them, the man with the map before him looked up, and Lord Ascot saw Charles Ravenshoe, pale and wan, looking like death itself, but still Charles Ravenshoe in the body.

He did not open the door. He turned away, went down into the street, and set his face northward.

So he was alive, and— There were more things to follow that "and" than he had time to think of at first He had a cunning brain, Lord Ascot, but he could not get at his position at first. The whole business was too unexpected—he had not time to realize it.

The afternoon was darkening as he turned his steps northwards, and began to walk rapidly, with scowling face and compressed lips. One or two of the students still lingered on the steps of the hospital. The one who had mentioned him by name before said to his fellows, "Look at that Lord Ascot. What a devil he looks. He has lost some money. Gad! there'll be murder done to-night. They oughtn't to let such fellows go loose!"

Charles Ravenshoe alive. And Lord Saltire's will. Half a million of money. And Charley Ravenshoe, the best old cock in the three kingdoms. Of all his villanies—and, God forgive him, they were many—the

one that weighed heaviest on his heart was his treatment of Charles. And now—

The people turned and looked after him as he hurled along. Why did his wayward feet carry him to the corner of Curzon Street? That was not his route to St. John's Wood. The people stared at the great red-faced giant, who paused against the lamp-post irresolute, biting his upper lip till the blood came. How would they have stared if they had seen what I see.[1]

There were two angels in the street that wretched winter afternoon, who had followed Lord Ascot in his headlong course, and paused here. He could see them but dimly, or only guess at their existence, but I can see them plainly enough.

One was a white angel, beautiful to look at, who stood a little way off, beckoning to him, and pointing towards Lord Saltire's house; and the other was black, with its face hid in a hood, who was close beside him, and kept saying in his ear, "Half a million! half a million!"

A strange apparition in Curzon Street, at four o'clock on a January afternoon! Gibbon lays great stress on no contemporary historian having noticed the darkness at the Crucifixion. If you search the files of the papers

[1] Perhaps a reference to "The Wild Huntsman" will stop all criticism at this point. A further reference to "Faust" will also show that I am in good company.

at this period, you will find no notice of any remarkable atmospheric phenomena in Curzon Street that afternoon. But two angels were there nevertheless, and Lord Ascot had a dim suspicion of it.

A dim suspicion of it! How could it be otherwise, when he heard a voice in one ear repeating Lady Ascot's last words, "What can save you from the terrible hereafter?" and in the other the stealthy whisper of the fiend, "Half a million! half a million!"

He paused only for a moment, and then headed northward again. The black angel was at his ear, but the white one was close to him—so close, that when his own door opened, the three passed in together. Adelaide, standing under the chandelier in the hall, saw nothing of the two spirits; only her husband, scowling fiercely.

She was going upstairs to dress, but she paused. As soon as Lord Ascot's "confidential scoundrel," before mentioned, had left the hall, she came up to him, and in a whisper, for she knew the man was listening, said:

"What is the matter, Welter?"

He looked as if he would have pushed her out of the way. But he did not. He said:

"I have seen Charles Ravenshoe."

"When?"

"To-night."

"Good God! Then it is almost a matter of time

with us," said Adelaide. "I had a dim suspicion of this, Ascot. It is horrible. We are ruined."

"Not yet," said Lord Ascot.

"There is time—time. He is obstinate and mad. Lord Saltire might die—"

"Well?"

"Either of them," she hissed out. "Is there no—"

"No what?"

"There is a half a million of money," said Adelaide.

"Well?"

"All sorts of things happen to people."

Lord Ascot looked at her for an instant, and snarled out a curse at her.

John Marston was perfectly right. He was a savage, untameable blackguard. He went upstairs into his bed-room. The two angels were with him. They are with all of us at such times as these. There is no plagiarism here. The fact is too old for that.

Up and down, up and down. The bed-room was not long enough; so he opened the door of the dressing-room; and that was not long enough; and so he opened the door of what had been the nursery in a happier household than his, and walked up and down through them all. And Adelaide sat below, before a single candle, with pale face and clenched lips, listening to his footfall on the floor above.

She knew as well as if an angel had told her what was passing in his mind as he walked up and down. She had foreseen this crisis plainly—you may laugh at me, but she had. She had seen that if, by any wild conjunction of circumstances, Charles Ravenshoe were alive, and if he were to come across him before Lord Saltire's death, events would arrange themselves exactly as they were doing on this terrible evening. There was something awfully strange in the realization of her morbid suspicions.

Yes, she had seen thus far, and had laughed at herself for entertaining such mad fancies. But she had seen no further. What the upshot would be was hidden from her like a dark veil. Black and impenetrable as the fog which was hanging over Waterloo Bridge at that moment, which made the squalid figure of a young, desperate girl show like a pale, fluttering ghost, leading a man whom we know well, a man who followed her, on the road to—what?

The rest, though, seemed to be, in some sort, in her own hands. Wealth, position in the world, the power of driving her chariot over the necks of those who had scorned her—the only things for which her worthless heart cared—were all at stake. "He will murder me," she said, "*but he shall hear me.*"

Still, up and down, over head, his heavy footfall went to and fro.

Seldom, in any man's life, comes such a trial as his this night. A good man might have been hard tried in such circumstances. What hope can we have of a desperate blackguard like Lord Ascot? He knew Lord Saltire hated him; he knew that Lord Saltire had only left his property to him because he thought Charles Ravenshoe was dead; and yet he hesitated whether or no he should tell Lord Saltire that he had seen Charles, and ruin himself utterly.

Was he such an utter rascal as John Marston made him out? Would such a rascal have hesitated long? What could make a man without a character, without principle, without a care about the world's opinion, hesitate at such a time like this? I cannot tell you.

He was not used to think about things logically or calmly; and so, as he paced up and down, it was some time before he actually arranged his thoughts. Then he came to this conclusion, and put it fairly before him—that, if he let Lord Saltire know that Charles Ravenshoe was alive, he was ruined; and that, if he did not, he was a villain.

Let us give the poor profligate wretch credit for getting even so far as this. There was no attempt to gloss over the facts and deceive himself. He put the whole matter honestly before him.

He would be a fool if he told Lord Saltire. He would

be worse than a fool, a madman—there was no doubt about that. It was not to be thought about.

But Charles Ravenshoe!

How pale the dear old lad looked. What a kind, gentle old face it was. How well he could remember the first time he ever saw him. At Twyford, yes; and, that very same visit, how he ran across the billiard-room, and asked him who Lord Saltire was. Yes. What jolly times there were down in Devonshire, too. Those Claycomb hounds wanted pace, but they were full fast enough for the country. And what a pottering old rascal Charley was among the stone walls. Rode through. Yes. And how he'd mow over a woodcock. Fire slap through a holly bush. Ha!

And suppose they proved this previous marriage. Why, then he would be back at Ravenshoe, and all things would be as they were. But suppose they couldn't—

Lord Ascot did not know that eighty thousand pounds were secured to Charles.

By Gad! it was horrible to think of. That it should be thrown on him, of all men, to stand between old Charley and his due. If it were any other man but him—

Reader, if you do not know that a man will act from "sentiment" long, long years after he has thrown

"principle" to the winds, you had better pack up your portmanteau, and go and live five years or more among Australian convicts and American rowdies, as a friend of mine did. The one long outlives the other. The incarnate devils who beat out poor Price's brains with their shovels, when they had the gallows before them, consistently perjured themselves in favour of the youngest of the seven, the young fiend who had hounded them on.

Why there never was such a good fellow as that Charley. That Easter vacation—hey! Among the bargees, hang it, what a game it was—I won't follow out his recollections here any further. Skittle-playing and fighting are all very well; but one may have too much of them.

"I might still do this," thought Lord Ascot; "I might—"

At this moment he was opposite the dressing-room door. It was opened, and Adelaide stood before him.

Beautiful and terrible, with a look which her husband had, as yet, only seen shadowed dimly—a look which he felt might come there some day, but which he had never seen yet. The light of her solitary candle shone upon her pale face, her gleaming eyes, and her clenched lip; and he saw what was written there, and for one moment quailed.

("If you were to say to me," said Lord Hainault once, "that Charles would be unwise to let Ascot's wife make his gruel for him, I should agree with you.")

Only for one moment! Then he turned on her and cursed her.

"What, in the name of Hell, do you want here at *this* moment?"

"You may murder me if you like, Ascot; but, before you have time to do that, you shall hear what I have got to say. I have been listening to your footsteps for a weary hour, and I heard irresolution in every one of them. Ascot, don't be a madman!"

"I shall be soon, if you come at such a time as this, and look like that. If my face were to take the same expression as yours has now, Lady Ascot, these would be dangerous quarters for you."

"I know that," she said. "I knew all that before I came up here to-night, Ascot. Ascot, half a million of money—"

"Why, all the devils in the pit have been singing that tune for an hour past. Have you only endangered your life to add your little pipe to theirs?"

"I have. Won't you hear me?"

"No. Go away."

"Are you going to do it?"

"Most likely not. You had better go away."

"You might give him a hundred thousand pounds, you know, Ascot. Four thousand a year. The poor dear fellow would worship you for your generosity. He is a very good fellow, Ascot."

"You had better go away," said he, quietly.

"Not without a promise, Ascot. Think—"

"Now go away. This is the last warning I give you. Madwoman!"

"But, Ascot—"

"Take care; it will be too late for both of us in another moment."

She caught his eyes for the first time, and fled for her life. She ran down into the drawing-room, and threw herself into a chair. "God preserve me!" she said, "I have gone too far with him. Oh, this lonely house!"

Every drop of blood in her body seemed to fly to her heart. There were footsteps outside the door. Oh, God! have mercy on her; he was following her.

Where were the two angels now, I wonder?

He opened the door, and came towards her slowly. If mortal agony can atone for sin, she atoned for all her sins in that terrible half-minute. She did not cry out; she dared not; she writhed down among the gaudy cushions, with her face buried in her hands, and waited —for what?

She heard a voice speaking to her. It was not his

voice, but the kind voice of old Lord Ascot, his dead father. It said—

"Adelaide, my poor girl, you must not get frightened when I get in a passion. My poor child, you have borne enough for me; I would not hurt a hair of your head."

He kissed her cheek, and Adelaide burst into a passion of sobs. After a few moments those sobs had ceased, and Lord Ascot left her. He did not know that she had fainted away. She never told him that.

Where were the angels now? Angels!—there was but one of them left. Which one was that, think you?

Hurrah! the good angel. The black fiend with the hood had sneaked away to his torment. And, as Lord Ascot closed the door behind him, and sped away down the foggy street, the good one vanished too; for the work was done. Ten thousand fiends would not turn him from his purpose now. Hurrah!

* * * * *

"Simpson," said Lord Saltire, as he got into bed that evening, "it won't last much longer."

"What will not last, my lord?" said Simpson.

"Why, me," said Lord Saltire, disregarding grammar. "Don't set up a greengrocer's shop, Simpson; nor a butter and egg shop, in Berkeley Street, if you can help

it, Simpson. If you must keep a lodging-house, I should say Jermyn Street; but don't let me influence you. I am not sure that I wouldn't sooner see you in Brook Street, or Conduit Street. But don't try Pall Mall, that's a good fellow; or you'll be getting fast men, who will demoralize your establishment. A steady connexion among government clerks and that sort of person will pay best in the long run."

"My dear lord—my good old friend, why should you talk like this to-night?"

"Because I am very ill, Simpson, and it will all come at once; and it may come any time. When they open Lord Barkham's room, at Cottingdean, I should like you and Mr. Marston to go in first, for I may have left something or another about."

An hour or two after, his bell rang, and Simpson, who was in the dressing-room, came hurriedly in. He was sitting up in bed, looking just the same as usual.

"My good fellow," he said, "go down and find out who rung and knocked at the door like that. Did you hear it?"

"I did not notice it, my lord."

"Butchers, and bakers, and that sort of people, don't knock and ring like that. The man at the door now brings news, Simpson. There is no mistake about the

ring of a man who comes with important intelligence. Go down and see."

He was not long gone. When he came back again, he said:

"It is Lord Ascot, my lord. He insists on seeing you immediately."

"Up with him, Simpson—up with him, my good fellow. I told you so. This gets interesting."

Lord Ascot was already in the doorway. Lord Saltire's brain was as acute as ever; and, as Lord Ascot approached him, he peered eagerly and curiously at him, in the same way as one scrutinizes the seal of an unopened letter, and wonders what its contents may be. Lord Ascot sat down by the bed, and whispered to the old man; and, when Simpson saw his great, coarse, red, hairless, ruffianly face actually touching that of Lord Saltire, so delicate, so refined, so keen, Simpson began to have a dim suspicion that he was looking on rather a remarkable sight. And so he was.

"Lord Saltire," said Lord Ascot, "I have seen Charles Ravenshoe to-night."

"You are quite sure?"

"I am quite sure."

"Ha! Ring the bell, Simpson." Before any one had spoken again, a footman was in the room. "Bring the major-domo here instantly," said Lord Saltire.

"You know what you have done, Ascot," said Lord Saltire. "You see what you have done. I am going to send for my solicitor, and alter my will."

"Of course you are," said Lord Ascot. "Do you dream I did not know that before I came here?"

"And yet you came?"

"Yes; with all the devils out of hell dragging me back."

"As a matter of curiosity, why?" said Lord Saltire.

"Oh, I couldn't do it, you know. I've done a good many dirty things; but I couldn't do that, particularly to that man. There are some things a fellow can't do, you know."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the Groom's Arms, Belgrave Mews; he was there not three hours ago. Find a man called Sloane, a horsedealer; he will tell you all about him; for he was sitting with his hand on his shoulder. His address is twenty-seven, New Road."

At this time the major-domo appeared. "Take a cab at once, and *fetch* me—you understand when I say *fetch* —Mr. Brogden, my solicitor. Mr. Compton lives out of town, but he lives over the office in Lincoln's Inn. If you can get hold of the senior partner, he will do as well. Put either of them in a cab and pack them off here. Then go to Scotland Yard; give my compliments

to Inspector Field; tell him a horrible murder has been committed, accompanied by arson, forgery, and regrating, with a strong suspicion of sorning, and that he must come at once."

That venerable gentleman disappeared, and then Lord Saltire said:

"Do you repent, Ascot?"

"No," said he. "D—— it all, you know, I could not do it when I came to think of it. The money would never have stayed with me, I take it. Good night."

"Good night," said Lord Saltire; "come the first thing in the morning."

And so they parted. Simpson said, "Are you going to alter your will to-night, my lord? Won't it be a little too much for you?"

"It would be if I was going to do so, Simpson; but I am not going to touch a line of it. I am not sure that half a million of money was ever, in the history of the world, given up with better grace or with less reason. He is a noble fellow; I never guessed it; he shall have it—by Jove, he shall have it! I am going to sleep. Apologize to Brogden, and give the information to Field; tell him I expect Charles Ravenshoe here to-morrow morning. Good night."

Simpson came in to open the shutters next morning;

but those shutters were not opened for ten days, for Lord Saltire was dead.

Dead. The delicate waxen right hand, covered with rings, was lying outside on the snow-white sheet, which was unwrinkled by any death agony; and on the pillow was a face, beautiful always, but now more beautiful, more calm, more majestic than ever. If his first love, dead so many years, had met him in the streets but yesterday, she would not have known him; but if she could have looked one moment on the face which lay on that pillow, she would have seen once more the gallant young nobleman who came a-wooing under the lime-trees sixty years agone.

The inspector was rapid and dexterous in his work. He was on Charles Ravenshoe's trail like a bloodhound, eager to redeem the credit which his coadjutor, Yard, had lost over the same case. But his instructions came to him three hours too late.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRIDGE AT LAST.

THE group which Lord Ascot had seen through the glass doors, consisted of Charles, the coachman's son, the coachman, and Mr. Sloane. Charles and the coachman's son had got hold of a plan of the battle of Balaclava, from the *Illustrated London News*, and were explaining the whole thing to the two older men, to their great delight. The four got enthusiastic and prolonged the talk for some time; and, when it began to flag, Sloane said he must go home, and so they came down into the bar.

Here a discussion arose about the feeding of cavalry horses, in which all four were perfectly competent to take part. The two young men were opposed in argument to the two elder ones, and they were having a right pleasant chatter about the corn or hay question in the bar, when the swing doors were pushed open, and a girl entered and looked round with that bold, insolent expression one only sees among a certain class.

A tawdry draggled-looking girl, finely enough dressed, but with everything awry and dirty. Her face was still almost beautiful; but the cheekbones were terribly prominent, and the hectic patch of red on her cheeks, and the parched cracked lips, told of pneumonia developing into consumption.

Such a figure had probably never appeared in that decent aristocratic public-house, called the Groom's Arms, since it had got its licence. The four men ceased their argument and turned to look at her; and the coachman, a family man with daughters, said, "Poor thing!"

With a brazen, defiant look she advanced to the bar. The barmaid, a very beautiful, quiet-looking, London-bred girl, advanced towards her, frightened at such a wild tawdry apparition, and asked her mechanically what she would please to take.

"I don't want nothing to drink, miss," said the girl; "leastways, I've got no money; but I want to ask a question. I say, miss, you couldn't give a poor girl one of them sandwiches, could you? You will never miss it, you know."

The barmaid's father, the jolly landlord, eighteen stone of good humour, was behind his daughter now. "Give her a porkpie, Jane, and a glass of ale, my girl."

"God Almighty bless you, sir, and keep her from the

dark places where the devil lies awaiting. I didn't come here to beg—it was only when I see them sandwiches that it come over me—I come here to ask a question. I know it ain't no use. But you can't see him—can't see him—can't see him," she continued, sobbing wildly, "rattling his poor soul away, and do not do as he asked you. I didn't come to get out for a walk. I sat there patient three days, and would have sat there till the end, but he would have me come. And so I came; and I must get back—get back."

The landlord's daughter brought her some food; and, as her eyes gleamed with wolfish hunger, she stopped speaking. It was a strange group. She in the centre, tearing at her food in a way terrible to see. Behind, the calm face of the landlord, looking on her with pity and wonder; and his pretty daughter, with her arm round his waist, and her head on his bosom, with tears in her eyes. Our four friends stood to the right, silent and curious—a remarkable group enough; for neither the duke's coachman, nor Mr. Sloane, who formed the background, were exactly ordinary-looking men; and in front of them were Charles and the coachman's son, who had put his head on Charles's right shoulder, and was peering over his left at the poor girl, so that the two faces were close together—the one handsome and pale, with the mouth hidden by a moustache; the other,

Charles's, wan and wild, with the lips parted in eager curiosity, and the chin thrust slightly forward.

In a few minutes the girl looked round on them. "I said I'd come here to ask a question; and I must ask it and get back. There was a gentleman's groom used to use this house, and I want him. His name was Charles Horton. If you, sir, or if any of these gentlemen, know where I can find him, in God Almighty's name tell me this miserable night."

Charles was pale before, but he grew more deadly pale now; his heart told him something was coming. His comrade, the coachman's son, held his hand tighter still on his shoulder, and looked in his face. Sloane and the coachman made an exclamation.

Charles said quietly, "My poor girl, I am the man you are looking for. What, in God's name, do you want with me?" and, while he waited for her to answer, he felt all the blood in his body going towards his heart.

"Little enough," she said. "Do you mind a little shoeblack boy as used to stand by St. Peter's Church?"

"Do I?" said Charles, coming towards her. "Yes, I do. My poor little lad. You don't mean to say that you know anything about him?"

"I am his sister, sir; and he is dying; and he says

he won't die not till you come. And I come off to see if I could find you. Will you come with me and see him?"

"Will I come!" said Charles. "Let us go at once. My poor little monkey. Dying, too!"

"Poor little man," said the coachman. "A many times I've heard you speak of him. Let's all go."

Mr. Sloane and his son seconded this motion.

"You mustn't come," said the girl. "There's a awful row in the court to-night; that's the truth. He's safe enough with me; but if you come, they'll think a mob's being raised. Now, don't talk of coming."

"You had better let me go alone," said Charles. "I feel sure that it would not be right for more of us to follow this poor girl than she chooses. I am ready."

And so he followed the girl out into the darkness; and, as soon as they were outside, she turned and said to him—

"You'd best follow me from a distance. I'll tell you why: I expect the police wants me, and you might get into trouble from being with me. Remember, if I am took, it's Marquis Court, Little Marjoram Street, and it's the end house, exactly opposite you as you go in. If you stands at the archway, and sings out for Miss Ophelia Flanigan, she'll come to you. But if the row ain't over, you wait till they're quiet. Whatever you

do, don't venture in by yourself, however quiet it may look: sing out for her."

And so she fluttered away through the fog, and he followed, walking fast to keep her in sight.

It was a dreadful night. The fog had lifted, and a moaning wind had arisen, with rain from the south-west. A wild, dripping, melancholy night, without rain enough to make one think of physical discomfort, and without wind enough to excite one.

The shoeblacks and the crossing-sweepers were shouldering their brooms and their boxes, and were plodding homewards. The costermongers were letting their barrows stand in front of the public-houses, while they went in to get something to drink, and were discussing the price of vegetables there, and being fetched out by dripping policemen, for obstructing her Majesty's highway. The beggars were gathering their rags together, and posting homewards; let us charitably suppose, to their bit of fish, with guinea-fowl and sea kale afterwards, or possibly, for it was not late in February, to their boiled pheasant and celery sauce. Every one was bound for shelter but the policemen. And Charles —poor, silly, obstinate Charles, with an earl's fortune waiting for him, dressed as a groom, pale, wan, and desperate—was following a ruined girl, more desperate even than he, towards the bridge.

Yes; this is the darkest part of my whole story. Since his misfortunes he had let his mind dwell a little too much on these bridges. There are very few men without a cobweb of some sort in their heads, more or less innocent. Charles had a cobweb in his head now. The best of men might have a cobweb in his head after such a terrible breakdown in his affairs as he had suffered; more especially if he had three or four splinters of bone in his deltoid muscle, which had prevented his sleeping for three nights. But I would sooner that any friend of mine should at such times take to any form of folly (such even as having fifty French clocks in the room, and discharging the butler if they did not all strike at once, as one good officer and brave fellow did) rather than get to thinking about bridges after dark, with the foul water lapping and swirling about the piers. I have hinted to you about this crotchet of poor Charles for a long time; I was forced to do so. I think the less we say about it the better. I call you to witness that I have not said more about it than was necessary.

At the end of Arabella Row, the girl stopped, and looked back for him. The Mews' clock was overhead, a broad orb of light in the dark sky. Ten minutes past ten. Lord Ascot was sitting beside Lord Saltire's bed, and Lord Saltire had rung the bell to send for Inspector Field.

She went on, and he followed her along the Mall. She walked fast, and he had hard work to keep her in sight. He saw her plainly enough whenever she passed a lamp. Her shadow was suddenly thrown at his feet, and then swept in a circle to the right, till it overtook her, and then passed her, and grew dim till she came to another lamp, and then came back to his feet, and passed on to her again, beckoning him on to follow her, and leading her—whither?

How many lamps were there? One, two, three, four; and then a man lying asleep on a bench in the rain, who said, with a wild, wan face, when the policeman roused him, and told him to go home, "My home is in the Thames, friend; but I shall not go there to-night, or perhaps to-morrow."

"His home was in the Thames." The Thames, the dear old happy river. The wonder and delight of his boyhood. That was the river that slept in crystal green depths, under the tumbled boulders fallen from the chalk cliff, where the ivy, the oak, and the holly grew; and then went spouting, and raging, and roaring through the weirs at Casterton, where he and Welter used to bathe, and where he lay and watched kind Lord Ascot spinning patiently through one summer afternoon, till he killed the eight-pound trout at sun-down.

That was the dear old Thames. But that was fifty

miles up the river, and ages ago. Now, and here, the river had got foul, and lapped about hungrily among piles, and barges, and the buttresses of bridges. And lower down it ran among mud banks. And there was a picture of one of them, by dear old H. K. Browne, and you didn't see at first what it was that lay among the sedges, because the face was reversed, and the limbs were—

They passed in the same order through Spring Gardens into the Strand. And then Charles found it more troublesome than ever to follow the poor girl in her rapid walk. There were so many like her there: but she walked faster than any of them. Before he came to the street which leads to Waterloo Bridge, he thought he had lost her; but when he turned the corner, and as the dank wind smote upon his face, he came upon her, waiting for him.

And so they went on across the bridge. They walked together now. Was she frightened, too?

When they reached the other end of the bridge, she went on again to show the way. A long way on past the Waterloo Station, she turned to the left. They passed out of a broad, low, noisy street, into other streets, some quiet, some turbulent, some blazing with the gas of miserable shops, some dark and stealthy, with only one or two figures in them, which disappeared

round corners, or got into dark archways as they passed Charles saw that they were getting into "Queer Street."

How that poor gaudy figure fluttered on! How i paused at each turning to look back for him, and the fluttered on once more! What innumerable turning there were! How should he ever find his way back— back to the bridge?

At last she turned into a street of greengrocers, an marine store-keepers, in which the people were all a their house doors looking out: all looking in one direc tion, and talking so earnestly to one another, that eve his top-boots escaped notice: which struck him as bein remarkable, as nearly all the way from Waterloo Bridg a majority of the populace had criticised them, eithe ironically; or openly, in an unfavourable manner. H thought they were looking at a fire, and turned his hea in the same direction; he only saw the poor girl, stand ing at the mouth of a narrow entry, watching for him.

He came up to her. A little way down a dark alle was an archway, and beyond there were lights, and noise of a great many people shouting, and talking, an screaming. The girl stole on, followed by Charles a fe steps, and then drew suddenly back. The whole of th alley, and the dark archway beyond, was lined wit policemen.

A brisk-looking, middle-sized man, with intensel

black scanty whiskers, stepped out, and stood before them. Charles saw at once that it was the inspector of police.

"Now then, young woman," he said, sharply, "what are you bringing that young man here for, eh?"

She was obliged to come forward. She began wringing her hands.

"Mr. Inspector," she said, "sir, I wish I may be struck dead, sir, if I don't tell the truth. It's my poor little brother, sir. He's a dying in number eight, sir, and he sent for this young man for to see him, sir. Oh! don't stop us, sir. S'elp me—"

"Pish!" said the inspector; "what the devil is the use of talking this nonsense to me? As for you, young man, you march back home double quick. You've no business here. It's seldom we see a gentleman's servant in such company in this part of the town."

"Pooh! pooh! my good sir," said Charles; "stuff and nonsense. Don't assume that tone with me, if you will have the goodness. What the young woman says is perfectly correct. If you can assist me to get to that house at the further end of the court, where the poor boy lies dying, I shall be obliged to you. If you can't, don't express an opinion without being in possession of circumstances. You may detain the girl, but I am going on. You don't know who you are talking to."

How the old Oxford insolence flashed out even at the last.

The inspector drew back and bowed. "I must do my duty, sir. Dickson!"

Dickson, in whose beat the court was, as he knew by many a sore bone in his body, came forward. He said, "Well, sir, I won't deny that the young woman is Bess, and perhaps she may be on the cross, and I don't go to say that what with flimping, and with cly-faking, and such like, she mayn't be wanted some day like her brother the Nipper was; but she is a good young woman, and a honest young woman in her way, and what she says this night about her brother is gospel truth."

"Flimping" is a style of theft which I have never practised, and, consequently, of which I know nothing. "Cly-faking" is stealing pocket-handkerchiefs. I never practised this either, never having had sufficient courage or dexterity. But, at all events, Police-constable Dickson's notion of "an honest young woman in her way" seems to me to be confused and unsatisfactory in the last degree.

The inspector said to Charles, "Sir, if gentlemen disguise themselves they must expect the police to be somewhat at fault till they open their mouths. Allow me to say, sir, that in putting on your servant's clothes

you have done the most foolish thing you possibly could. You are on an errand of mercy, it appears, and I will do what I can for you. There's a doctor and a Scripture reader somewhere in the court now, so our people say. *They* can't get out. I don't think you have much chance of getting in."

"By Jove!" said Charles, "do you know that you are a deuced good fellow? I am sorry that I was rude to you, but I am in trouble, and irritated. I hope you'll forgive me."

"Not another word, sir," said the inspector. "Come and look here, sir. You may never see such a sight again. *Our* people daren't go in. This, sir, is, I believe, about the worst court in London."

"I thought," said Charles, quite forgetting his top-boots, and speaking "*de haut en bas*," as in old times—"I thought that your Rosemary Lane carried off the palm as being a lively neighbourhood?"

"Lord bless you," said the inspector, "nothing to this;—look here."

They advanced to the end of the arch, and looked in. It was as still as death, but it was as light as day, for there were candles burning in every window.

"Why," said Charles, "the court is empty. I can run across. Let me go; I am certain I can get across."

"Don't be a lunatic, sir," said the inspector, holding

him tight; "wait till I give you the word, unless you want six months in Guy's Hospital."

Charles soon saw the inspector was right, There were three houses on each side of the court. The centre one on the right was a very large one, which was approached on each side by a flight of three steps, guarded by iron railings, which, in meeting, formed a kind of platform or rostrum. This was Mr. Malone's house, whose wife chose, for family reasons, to call herself Miss Ophelia Flanigan.

The court was silent and hushed, when, from the door exactly opposite to this one, there appeared a tall and rather handsome young man, with a great frieze coat under one arm, and a fire-shovel over his shoulder.

This was Mr. Dennis Moriarty, junior. He advanced to the arch, so close to Charles and the inspector that they could have touched him, and then walked down the centre of the court, dragging the coat behind him, lifting his heels defiantly high at every step, and dexterously beating a "chune on the bare head of um wid the fire-shovel. Hurroo!"

He had advanced half-way down the court without a soul appearing, when suddenly the enemy poured out on him in two columns, from behind two doorways, and he was borne back, fighting like a hero with his fire-shovel, into one of the doors on his own side of the court.

The two columns of the enemy, headed by Mr. Phelim O'Neill, uniting, poured into the doorway after him, and from the interior of the house arose a hubbub, exactly as though people were fighting on the stairs.

At this point there happened one of those mistakes which so often occur in warfare, which are disastrous at the time, and inexplicable afterwards. Can anyone explain why Lord Lucan gave that order at Balaclava? No. Can anyone explain to me, why, on this occasion, Mr. Phelim O'Neill headed the attack on the staircase in person, leaving his rear struggling in confusion in the court, by reason of their hearing the fun going on inside, and not being able to get at it? I think not. Such was the case, however, and, in the midst of it, Mr. Malone, howling like a demon, and horribly drunk, followed by thirty or forty worse than himself, dashed out of a doorway close by, and before they had time to form line of battle, fell upon them hammer and tongs.

I need not say that after this surprise in the rear, Mr. Phelim O'Neill's party had very much the worst of it. In about ten minutes, however, the two parties were standing opposite one another once more, inactive from sheer fatigue.

At this moment Miss Ophelia Flanigan appeared from the door of No. 8—the very house that poor Charles was so anxious to get to—and slowly and majestically ad-

vanced towards the rostrum in front of her own door, and, ascending the steps, folded her arms and looked about her.

She was an uncommonly powerful, red-faced Irishwoman; her arms were bare, and she had them akimbo, and was scratching her elbows.

Every schoolboy knows that the lion has a claw at the end of his tail with which he lashes himself into fury. When the experienced hunter sees him doing that, he, so to speak, "hooks it." When Miss Flanigan's enemies saw her scratching her elbows, they generally did the same. She was scratching her elbows now. There was a dead silence.

One woman in that court, and one only, ever offered battle to the terrible Miss Ophelia: that was young Mrs. Phaylim O'Nale. On the present occasion she began slowly walking up and down in front of the expectant hosts. While Miss Flanigan looked on in contemptuous pity, scratching her elbows, Mrs. O'Neill opened her fire.

"Pussey, pussey!" she began, "kitty, kitty, kitty! Miaow, miaow!" (Mr. Malone had accumulated property in the cats' meat business.) "Morraow, ye little tabby divvle, don't come anighst her, my Kitleen Avourneen, or yill be convarted into sassidge mate, and sowld to keep a drunken one-eyed ould rapparee, from

the county Cark, as had two months for bowling his barrer sharp round the corner of Park Lane over a ould gineral officer, in a white hat and a green silk umbereller; and as married a red-haired woman from the county Waterford, as calls herself by her maiden name, and never feels up to fighting but when the licker's in her, which it most in general is, pussey; and let me see the one of Malone's lot or Moriarty's lot ather, for that matter, as will deny it. Miaow!"

Miss Ophelia Flanigan blew her nose contemptuously. Some of the low characters in the court had picked her pocket.

Mrs. O'Neill quickened her pace and raised her voice. She was beginning again, when the poor girl who was with Charles ran into the court and cried out, "Miss Flanigan! I have brought him; Miss Flanigan!"

In a moment the contemptuous expression faded from Miss Flanigan's face. She came down off the steps and advanced rapidly towards where Charles stood. As she passed Mrs. O'Neill she said, "Whist now, Biddy O'Nale, me darlin. I ain't up to a shindy to-night. Ye know the rayson."

And Mrs. O'Neill said, "Ye're a good woman, Ophelia Sorra a one of me would have loosed tongue on ye this night, only I thought it might cheer ye up a bit after yer watching. Don't take notice of me, that's a dear."

Miss Flanigan went up to Charles, and, taking him by the arm, walked with him across the court. It was whispered rapidly that this was the young man who had been sent for to see little Billy Wilkins, who was dying in No. 8. Charles was as safe as if he had been in the centre of a square of the Guards. As he went into the door they gave him a cheer; and, when the door closed behind him, they went on with their fighting again.

Charles found himself in a squalid room, about which there was nothing remarkable but its meanness and dirt. There were four people there when he came in—a woman asleep by the bed, two gentlemen who stood aloof in the shadow, and the poor little wan and wasted boy in the bed.

Charles went up and sat by the bed; when the boy saw him he made an effort, rose half up, and threw his arms round his neck. Charles put his arm round him and supported him—as strange a pair, I fancy, as you will meet in many long days' marches.

"If you would not mind, Miss Flanigan," said the doctor, "stepping across the court with me, I shall be deeply obliged to you. You, sir, are going to stay a little longer."

"Yes, sir," said the other gentleman, in a harsh, unpleasant voice; "I shall stay till the end."

"You won't have to stay very long, my dear sir," said the doctor. "Now, Miss Flanigan, I am ready. Please to call out that the doctor is coming through the court, and that, if any man lays a finger on him, he will exhibit Croton and other drastics to him till he wishes he was dead, and after that, throw in quinine till the top of his head comes off. *Allons*, my dear madam."

With this dreadful threat the doctor departed. The other gentleman, the Scripture reader, stayed behind, and sat in a chair in the further corner. The poor mother was sleeping heavily. The poor girl who had brought Charles, sat down in a chair and fell asleep with her head on a table.

The dying child was gone too far for speech. He tried two or three times, but he only made a rattle in his throat. After a few minutes he took his arms from round Charles's neck, and, with a look of anxiety, felt for something by his side. When he found it he smiled, and held it towards Charles. Well, well; it was only the ball that Charles had given him—

Charles sat on the bed, and put his left arm round the child, so that the little death's head might lie upon his breast. He took the little hand in his. So they remained. How long?

I know not. He only sat there with the hot head against his heart, and thought that a little life, so

strangely dear to him, now that all friends were gone, was fast ebbing away, and that he must get home again that night across the bridge.

The little hand that he held in his relaxed its grasp, and the boy was dead. He knew it, but he did not move. He sat there still with the dead child in his arms, with a dull terror on him, when he thought of his homeward journey across the bridge.

Some one moved and came towards him. The mother and the girl were still asleep—it was the Scripture reader. He came towards Charles, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. And Charles turned from the dead child, and looked up into his face—into the face of John Marston.

CHAPTER XII.

SAVED.

WITH the wailing mother's voice in their ears, those two left the house. The court was quiet enough now. The poor savages who would not stop their riot lest they should disturb the dying, now talked in whispers lest they should awaken the dead.

They passed on quickly together. Not one word had been uttered between them—not one—but they pushed rapidly through the worst streets to a better part of the town, Charles clinging tight to John Marston's arm, but silent. When they got to Marston's lodgings, Charles sat down by the fire, and spoke for the first time. He did not burst out crying, or anything of that sort. He only said quietly—

"John, you have saved me. I should never have got home this night."

But John Marston, who, by finding Charles, had dashed his dearest hopes to the ground, did not take

things quite so quietly. Did he think of Mary now? Did he see in a moment that his chance of her was gone? And did he not see that he loved her more deeply than ever?

"Yes," I answer to all these three questions. How did he behave now?

Why, he put his hand on Charles's shoulder, and he said, "Charles, Charles, my dear old boy, look up and speak to me in your dear old voice. Don't look wild like that. Think of Mary, my boy. She has been wooed by more than one, Charles; but I think that her heart is yours yet."

"John," said Charles, "that is what has made me hide from you all like this. I know that she loves me above all men. I dreamt of it the night I left Ravenshoe. I knew it the night I saw her at Lord Hainault's. And partly that she should forget a penniless and disgraced man like myself, and partly (for I have been near the gates of hell to-night, John, and can see many things) from a silly pride, I have spent all my cunning on losing myself—hoping that you would believe me dead, thinking that you would love my memory, and dreading lest you should cease to love Me."

"We loved your memory well enough, Charles. You will never know how well, till you see how well we love yourself. We have hunted you hard, Charles. How

you have contrived to avoid us, I cannot guess. You do not know, I suppose, that you are a rich man?"

"A rich man?"

"Yes. Even if Lord Saltire does not alter his will, you come into three thousand a year. And, besides, you are undoubtedly heir to Ravenshoe, though one link is still wanting to prove that."

"What do you mean?"

"There is no reasonable doubt, although we cannot prove it, that your grandfather Petre was married previously to his marriage with Lady Alicia Staunton, that your father James was the real Ravenshoe, and that Ellen and yourself are the elder children, while poor Cuthbert and William—"

"Cuthbert! Does he know of this? I will hide again; I will never displace Cuthbert, mind you."

"Charles, Cuthbert will never know anything about it. Cuthbert is dead. He was drowned bathing last August."

Hush! There is something, to me, dreadful in a man's tears. I dare say that it was as well, that night, that the news of Cuthbert's death should have made him break down and weep himself into quietness again like a child. I am sure it was for the best. But it is the sort of thing that good taste forbids one to dwell upon or handle too closely.

When he was quiet again, John went on:

"It seems incredible that you should have been able to elude us so long. The first intelligence we had of you was from Lady Ascot, who saw you in the Park."

"Lady Ascot? I never saw my aunt in the Park."

"I mean Adelaide. She is Lady Ascot now. Lord Ascot is dead."

"Another of them!" said Charles. "John, before you go on, tell me how many more are gone."

"No more. Lady Ascot and Lord Saltire are alive and well. I was with Lord Saltire to-day, and he was talking of you. He has left the principal part of his property to Ascot. But, because none of us would believe you dead, he has made a reservation in your favour of eighty thousand pounds."

"I am all abroad," said Charles. "How is William?"

"He is very well, as he deserves to be. Noble fellow! He gave up everything to hunt you through the world like a bloodhound and bring you back. He never ceased his quest till he saw your grave at Varna."

"At Varna!" said Charles; "why, we were quartered at Devna."

"At Devna! Now, my dear old boy, I am but mortal; do satisfy my curiosity. What regiment did you enlist in?"

"In the 140th."

"Then how, in the name of all confusion," cried John Marston, "did you miss poor Hornby?"

"I did not miss Hornby," said Charles, quietly. "I had his head in my lap when he died. But now tell me, how on earth did you come to know anything about him?"

"Why, Ascot told us that you had been his servant. And he came to see us, and joined in the chase with the best of us. How is it that he never sent us any intelligence of you?"

"Because I never went near him till the film of death was on his eyes. Then he knew me again, and said a few words which I can understand now. Did he say anything to any of you about Ellen?"

"About Ellen?"

"Yes. Did Ascot ever say anything either?"

"He told Lord Saltire, what I suppose you know—"

"About what?"

"About Ellen?"

"Yes, I know it all."

"And that he had met you. Now tell me what you have been doing."

"When I found that there was no chance of my remaining *perdu* any longer, and when I found that Ellen was gone, why, then I enlisted in the 140th. . . ."

He paused here, and hid his face in his hands for some time. When he raised it again his eyes were wilder, and his speech more rapid.

"I went out with Tom Sparks and the Roman-nosed bay horse; and we ran a thousand miles in sixty-three hours. And at Devna we got wood-pigeons; and the cornet went down and dined with the 42d at Varna; and I rode the Roman-nosed bay, and he carried me through it capitally, I ask your pardon, sir, but I am only a poor discharged trooper. I would not beg, sir, if I could help it; but pain and hunger are hard things to bear, sir."

"Charles, Charles, don't you know me?"

"That is my name, sir. That is what they used to call me. I am no common beggar, sir. I was a gentleman once, sir, and rode a-horseback after a blue greyhound, and we went near to kill a black hare. I have a character from Lord Ascot, sir. I was in the light cavalry charge at Balaclava. An angry business. They shouldn't get good fellows to fight together like that. I killed one of them, sir. Hornby killed many, and he is a man who wouldn't hurt a fly. A sad business!"

"Charles, old boy, be quiet."

"When you speak to me, sir, of the distinction between the upper and lower classes, I answer you,

that I have had some experience in that way of late, and have come to the conclusion that, after all, the gentleman and the cad are one and the same animal. Now that I am a ruined man, begging my bread about the streets, I make bold to say to you, sir, hoping that your alms may be none the less for it, that I am not sure that I do not like your cad as well as your gentleman, in his way. If I play on the one side such cards as my foster-brother William and Tom Sparks, you, of course, trump me with John Marston and the cornet. You are right; but they are all four good fellows. I have been to death's gate to learn it. I will resume my narrative. At Devna the cornet, besides woodpigeons, shot a francolin—"

It is just as well that this sort of thing did not come on when Charles was going home alone across the bridge; that is all I wished to call your attention to. The next morning, Lord and Lady Hainault, old Lady Ascot, William, Mary, and Father Tiernay, were round his bed, watching the hot head rolling from side to side upon the pillow, and listening to his half-uttered delirious babble, gazing with a feeling almost of curiosity at the well-loved face which had eluded them so long.

"Oh, Hainault! Hainault!" said Lady Ascot, "to find him like this after all! And Saltire dead without

seeing him! and all my fault, my fault. I am a wicked old woman; God forgive me!"

Lord Hainault got the greatest of the doctors into a corner, and said:—

"My dear Dr. B——, will he die?"

"Well, yes," said the doctor; "to you I would sooner say yes than no, the chances are so heavy against him. The surgeons like the look of things still less than the physicians. You must really prepare for the worst."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. JACKSON'S BIG TROUT.

Of course, he did not die; I need not tell you that. B—— and P. H—— pulled him through, and shook their honest hands over his bed. Poor B—— is reported to have winked on this occasion; but such a proceeding was so unlike him, that I believe the report must have come round to us through one of the American papers—probably the same one which represented the Prince of Wales hitting the Duke of Newcastle in the eye with a champagne cork.

However, they pulled him through; and, in the pleasant spring-time, he was carried down to Casterton. Things had gone so hard with him, that the primroses were in blossom on the southern banks before he knew that Lord Saltire was dead, and before he could be made to understand that he was a rich man.

From this much of the story we may safely deduce this moral, "That, if a young gentleman gets into dif-

ficulties, it is always as well for him to leave his address with his friends." But, as young gentlemen in difficulties generally take particularly good care to remind their friends of their whereabouts, it follows that this story has been written to little or no purpose. Unless, indeed, the reader can find for himself another moral or two; and I am fool enough to fancy that he may do that, if he cares to take the trouble.

Casterton is built on arches, with all sorts of offices and kitchens under what would naturally be the ground floor. The reason why Casterton was built on arches (that is to say, as far as you and I are concerned) is this: that Charles, lying on the sofa in Lord Hainault's study, could look over the valley and see the river; which, if it had been built on the ground, he could not have done. From this window he could see the great weirs spouting and foaming all day; and, when he was carried up to bed, by William and Lord Hainault, he could hear the roar of them rising and sinking, as the night-wind came and went, until they lulled him to sleep.

He lay here one day, when the doctors came down from London. And one of them put a handkerchief over his face, which smelt like chemical experiments, and somehow reminded him of Dr. Daubeny. And, he fell asleep; and when he awoke, he was suffering pain

in his left arm—not the old dull grinding pain, but sharper; which gradually grew less as he lay and watched the weirs at Casterton. They had removed the splinters of bone from his arm.

He did not talk much in this happy quiet time. William and Lady Ascot were with him all day. William, dear fellow, used to sit on a footstool, between his sofa and the window, and read the *Times* to him. William's education was imperfect, and he read very badly. He would read Mr. Russell's correspondence till he saw Charles's eye grow bright, and hear his breath quicken, and then he would turn to the list of bankrupts. If this was too sad, he would go on to the share list, and pound away at that, till Charles went to sleep, which he generally did pretty quickly.

About this time—that is to say, well in the spring—Charles asked two questions:—The first was, whether or no he might have the window open; the next, whether Lord Hainault would lend him an opera-glass?

Both were answered in the affirmative. The window was opened, and Lord Hainault and William came in, bearing, not an opera-glass, but a great brass telescope, on a stand—a thing with an eight-inch object-glass, which had belonged to old Lord Hainault, who was a Cambridge man, and given to such vanities.

This was very delightful. He could turn it with a

move of his hand on to any part of the weirs, and see almost every snail which crawled on the burdocks. The very first day he saw one of the men from the paper-mill come to the fourth weir, and pull up the paddles to ease the water. The man looked stealthily round, and then raised a wheel from below the apron, full of spawning perch. And this was close time! Oho!

Then, a few days after, came a tall, grey-headed gentleman, spinning a bleak for trout, who had with him a lad in top-boots, with a landing-net. And this gentleman sent his bait flying out here and there across the water, and rattled his line rapidly into the palm of his hand in a ball, like a consummate master, as he was. (King among fishermen, prince among gentlemen, you will read these lines, and you will be so good as to understand that I am talking of you.) And this gentleman spun all day and caught nothing.

But he came the next day to the same place, and spun again. The great full south-westerly wind was roaring up the valley, singing among the budding trees, and carrying the dark, low, rainless clouds swiftly before it. At two, just as Lady Ascot and William had gone to lunch, and after Charles had taken his soup and a glass of wine, he, lying there, and watching this gentleman diligently, saw his rod bend, and his line tighten.

The lad in the top-boots and the landing-net leaped up from where he lay; there was no doubt about it now. The old gentleman had got hold of a fish, and a big one.

The next twenty minutes were terrible. The old gentleman gave him the but, and moved slowly down along the camp-shuting, and Charles followed him with the telescope, although his hand was shaking with excitement. After a time, the old gentleman began to wind up his reel, and then the lad, top-boots, and landing-net, and all, slipped over the camp-shooting (will anybody tell me how to spell that word? *Camps-heading* won't do, my dear sir, all things considered) and lifted the fish (he was nine pound), up among the burdocks at the old gentleman's feet.

Charles had the whole group in the telescope—the old gentleman, the great trout, and the dripping lad, taking off his boots and emptying the water out of them. But the old gentleman was looking to his right at somebody who was coming, and immediately there came into the field of the telescope a tall man in a velvet coat, with knee breeches and gaiters, and directly afterwards, from the other side, three children, and a young lady. The gentleman in the knee breeches bowed to the young lady, and then they all stood looking at the trout.

Charles could see them quite plainly. The gentle-

man in velveteen and small-clothes was Lord Ascot, and the young lady was Mary.

He did not look through the telescope any more; he lay back, and tried to think. Presently afterwards old Lady Ascot came in, and settled herself in the window, with her knitting.

"My dear," she said, "I wonder if I fidget you with my knitting-needles? Tell me if I do, for I have plenty of other work."

"Not at all, dear aunt; I like it. You did nineteen rows this morning, and you would have done twenty-two if you had not dropped a stitch. When I get stronger I shall take to it myself. There would be too much excitement and over exertion in it, for me to begin just now."

Lady Ascot laughed; she was glad to see him trying even such a feeble joke. She said—

"My dear, Mr. Jackson has killed a trout in the weirs just now, nine pounds."

"I know," said Charles; "I did not know the weight, but I saw the fish. Aunt, where is Welter —I mean, Ascot?"

"Well, he is at Ranford. I suppose you know, my dear boy, that poor James left him nearly all his fortune. Nearly five hundred thousand pounds' worth, with Cottingdean and Marksworth together. All the

Ranford mortgages are paid off, and he is going on very well, my dear. I think they ought to give him his marquisate. James might have had it ten times over of course, but he used to say, that he had made himself the most notorious viscount in England, and that if he took an earldom, people would forget who he was."

"I wish he would come to see me, aunt. I am very fond of Welter."

I can't help it; he said so. Remember how near death's door he had been. Think what he had been through. How he had been degraded, and kicked about from pillar to post, like an old shoe; and also remember the state he was in when he said it. I firmly believe that he had at this time forgotten everything, and that he only remembered Lord Ascot as his old boy love, and his jolly college companion. You must make the best of it, or the worst of it for him, as you are inclined. He said so. And in a very short time Lady Ascot found that she wanted some more wool, and hobbled away to get it.

After a time, Charles heard a man come into the room. He thought it was William; but it was not. This man came round the end of the sofa, and stood in the window before him. Lord Ascot.

He was dressed as we know, having looked through Charles's telescope, in a velveteen coat, with knee

breeches and leathern gaiters. There was not much change in him since the old times, only his broad, hairless face seemed redder, his lower jaw seemed coarser and more prominent, his great eyebrows seemed more lowering, his vast chest seemed broader and deeper, and altogether he looked rather more like a mighty, coarse, turbulent blackguard than ever.

"Well, old cock," he said, "so you are on your back, hey?"

"Welter," said Charles, "I am so glad to see you again. If you would help me up, I should like to look at you."

"Poor old boy," said Lord Ascot, putting his great arm round him, and raising him, "So! there you are, my pippin. What a good old fellow you are, by Gad! So you were one of the immortal six hundred, hey? I thought you would turn up somewhere in Queer Street, with that infernal old hook nose of yours. I wish I had taken to that sort of thing, for I am fond of fighting. I think, now I am rich and respectable, I shall subsidize a prize-fighter to pitch into me once a fortnight. I wish I had been respectable enough for the army; but I should always have been in trouble with the commander-in-chief for dicing and brawling, I suppose. Well, old man, I am devilish glad to see you again. I am in possession

of money which should have been yours. I did all I could for you, Charles; you will never know how much. I tried to repair the awful wrong I did you unconsciously. I did a thing in your favour I tremble to think of now, but which, God help me, I would do again. You don't know what I mean. If old Saltire had not died so quick, you would have known."

He was referring to his having told Lord Saltire that he had seen Charles. In doing that, remember he had thought that he was throwing half a million to the winds. I only tell you that he was referring to this, for fear you should not gather it from his own brutal way of speaking.

I wonder how the balance will stand against Lord Ascot at last? Who ever could have dreamt that his strong animal affection for his old friend could have led him to make a sacrifice which many a more highly organized man would have evaded, glossing over his conscience by fifty mental subterfuges?

"However, my dear fellow," he continued, "it comes to this: I have got the money; I shall have no children; and I shall make no will; therefore it all comes to you, if you outlive me. About the title I can't say. The lawyers must decide about that. No one seems to know whether or not it descends through

the female branch. By-the-by, you are not master of Ravenshoe yet, though there seems no doubt that grandma is right, and that the marriage took place. However, whether the estate goes to you, or to William, I offer the same advice to both of you: if you get my money, don't spend it in getting the title. You can get into the House of Commons easy enough, if you seem to care about that sort of fun; and fellows I know, tell me that you get much better amusement there for your money than in the other place. I have never been to the House of Lords since the night I took my seat. It struck me as being slow. The fellows say that there is never any chaff, or personalities, or calling to order, or that sort of thing there, which seem to me to be half the fun of the fair. But, of course, you know more about this than I."

Charles, in a minute, when he had ineffectually tried to understand what Lord Ascot had been saying, collected his senses sufficiently to say:

"Welter, old boy, look here, for I am very stupid. Why did you say that you should have no children?"

"Of course I can't; have they told you nothing?"

"Is Adelaide dead, Welter?" asked Charles, plucking at the buttons of his coat nervously.

"They ought to have told you, Charles," said Lord Ascot, turning to the window. "Now tell me something. Have you any love left for her yet?"

"Not one spark," said Charles, still buttoning and unbuttoning his coat. "If I ever am a man again, I shall ask Mary Corby to marry me. I ought to have done so sooner, perhaps. But I love your wife, Welter, in a way; and I should grieve at her death, for I loved her once. By Gad! yes; you know it. When did she die?"

"She is not dead, Charles."

"Now, don't keep me like this, old man; I can't stand it. She is no more to me than my sister—not so much. Tell me what is the matter at once; it can't be worse than what I think."

"The truth is very horrible, Charles," said Lord Ascot, speaking slowly. "She took a fancy that I should buy back her favourite old Irish mare, 'Molly Asthore,' and I bought it for her; and we went out hunting together, and we were making a nick, and I was getting the gate open for her, when the devil rushed it; and down they came on it, together. And she broke her back—Oh, God! oh, God!—and the doctor says she may live till seventy, but that she will never move from where she lies—and just as I was getting to love her so dearly—"

Charles said nothing; for with such a great, brutal blackguard as Lord Ascot, sobbing passionately at the window, it was as well to say nothing; but he thought, "Here's work to the fore, I fancy, after a life of laziness. I have been the object of all these dear souls' anxiety for a long time. She must take my place now."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH GUS CUTS FLORA'S DOLL'S CORNS.

THAT afternoon Charles said nothing more, but lay and looked out of the window at the rhododendrons just bursting into bloom, at the deer, at the rabbits, at the pheasants; and beyond, where the park dipped down so suddenly, at the river which spouted and foamed away as of old; and to the right at the good old town of Casterton, and at the blue smoke from its chimneys, drifting rapidly away before the soft south-westerly wind; and he lay and looked at these and thought.

And before sundown an arch arose in the west which grew and spread; an arch of pale green sky, which grew till it met the sun, and then the wet grass in the park shone out all golden, and the topmost cedar boughs began to blaze like burnished copper.

And then he spoke. He said, "William, my dear old friend—loved more deeply than any words can tell—come here, for I have something to say to you."

And good William came and stood beside him. And

William looked at him and saw that his face was animated, and that his eyes were sparkling. And he stood and said not a word, but smiled and waited for him to go on.

And Charles said, "Old boy, I have been looking through that glass to-day, and I saw Mr. Jackson catch the trout, and I saw Welter, and I saw Mary, and I want you to go and fetch Mary here."

And William straightway departed; and as he went up the staircase he met the butler, and he looked so happy, so radiant, and so thoroughly kind-hearted and merry, that the butler, a solemn man, found himself smiling as he drew politely aside to let him pass.

I hope you like this fellow, William. He was, in reality, only a groom, say you. Well, that is true enough. A fellow without education or breeding, though highly born. But still, I hope you like him. I was forgetting myself a little though. At this time he is master of Ravenshoe, with certainly nine, and probably twelve, thousand a year—a most eminently respectable person. One year's income of his would satisfy a man I know, very well, and yet I am talking of him apologetically. But then we novel writers have an unlimited command of money, if we could only realize it.

However, this great capitalist went up stairs towards the nursery; and here I must break off, if you please,

and take up the thread of my narrative in another place (I don't mean the House of Lords).

In point of fact, there had been a shindy (I use the word advisedly, and will repeat it)—a shindy, in the nursery that evening. The duty of a story-teller is to stick in a moral reflection wherever he can, and so at this place I pitchfork in this caution to young governesses, that nothing can be more incautious or reprehensible, than to give children books to keep them quiet without first seeing what these books are about.

Mary was very much to blame in this case (you see I tell the truth, and spare nobody). Gus, Flora, and Archy had been out to walk with her, as we know, and had come home in a very turbulent state of mind. They had demanded books as the sole condition on which they would be good; and Mary being in a fidget about her meeting with Lord Ascot, over the trout, and being not quite herself, had promptly supplied Gus with a number of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and Flora with a "Shakspeare."

This happened early in the afternoon. Remember this; for if we are not particular in our chronology, we are naught.

Gus turned to the advertisements. He read among other things a testimonial to a great corn-cutter, from a potentate who keeps a very small army, and don't mean any harm:—

" (TRANSLATION.)

" Professor Homberg has cut my corns with a dexterity truly marvellous.

(Signed) " NAPOLEON."

From a country baronet :—

" I am satisfied with Professor Homberg.

(Signed) " PITCHCROFT COCKPOLE, Bart."

From a bishop in the South Sea Islands :—

" Professor Homberg has cut my corns in a manner which does equal honour to his head and his heart.

(Signed) " RANGEHAIETA."

(His real name is Jones, but that is neither here nor there) ; and in the mean time Flora had been studying a certain part of " King Lear."

Later in the afternoon it occurred to Gus, that he would like to be a corn-cutter and have testimonials. He proposed to cut nurse's corns, but she declined, assigning reasons. Failing here, he determined to cut Flora's doll's corns, and, with this view, possessed himself of her person during Flora's temporary absence.

He began by snicking the corner of her foot off with nurse's scissors. Then he found that the sawdust

dribbled out at the orifice. This was very delightful. He shook her and it dribbled faster. Then he cut the other foot off and shook her again. And she, not having any stitches put in about the knee (as all dolls should), lost, not only the sawdust from her legs, but also from her stomach and body, leaving nothing but collapsed calico and a bust, with an undisturbed countenance of wax above all.

At this time Flora had rushed in to the rescue; she felt the doll's body and she saw the heap of sawdust; whereupon she, remembering her "King Lear," turned on him and said scornfully:

"Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness." At this awful taunt, Gus butted her in the stomach, and she got hold of him by the hair. Archy, excited for the first time in his life, threw a box of ninepins at them, which exploded. Mary rushed in to separate them, and at the same moment in came William with a radiant face, and he quietly took Mary round the waist (like his impudence), and he said, "My dear creature, go down to Charles, and leave these Turks to me."

And she left these Turks to him. And he sat on a chair and administered justice; and in a very few minutes, under the influence of that kind, happy, sunny face of his, Flora had kissed Gus, and Archy had cuddled up on his knee, and was sucking his thumb in peace.

And going down to the hall, he found Lady Ascot hobbling up and down, taking her afternoon's exercise, and she said to him, "Ravenshoe, you best and kindest of souls, she is there with him now. My dear, we had better not move in this matter any more. I tried to dispossess you before I knew your worth and goodness, but I will do nothing now. He is rich, and perhaps it is better, my dear, that Ravenshoe should be in Papist hands—at least, in such hands as yours."

He said, "My dear madam, I am not Ravenshoe. I feel sure that you are right. We must find Ellen."

And Mary came out and came toward them; and she said, "Lady Ascot and Mr. Ravenshoe, Charles and I are engaged to be married."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ALLIED ARMIES ADVANCE ON RAVENSHOE.

How near the end we are getting, and yet so much to come. Never mind. We will tell it all naturally and straightforwardly, and then there will be nothing to offend you.

By-and-by it became necessary that Charles should have air and exercise. His arm was well. Every splinter had been taken out of it, and he must lie on the sofa no longer.

So he was driven out through pleasant places, through the budding spring, in one of Lord Hainault's carriages. All the meadows had been bush-harrowed and rolled long ago, and now the orchises and fritillaries were beginning to make the grass look purple. Lady Hainault had a low carriage, and a pair of small cobs, and this was given up to Charles; and Lady Hainault's first coachman declined to drive her ladyship out in the day-time, for fear that the second coachman (a meritorious young man of forty) should frighten Charles by a reckless and inexperienced way of driving.

Consequently Lady Hainault went a buying flannel petticoats and that sort of thing, for the poor people in Casterton and Henley, driven by her second coachman; and Charles was trundled all over the country by the first coachman, in a low carriage with the pair of cobs. But Lady Hainault was as well pleased with the arrangement as the old coachman himself, and so it is no business of ours. For the curious thing was, that no one who ever knew Charles, would have hesitated for an instant in giving up to him, his or her, bed, or dinner, or carriage, or any other thing in this world. For people are great fools, you know.

Perhaps the reason of it was that every one who made Charles's acquaintance, knew by instinct that he would have cut off his right hand to serve them. I don't know why it was. But there is the fact.

Sometimes Lady Ascot would go with him, and sometimes William. And one day, when William was with him, they were bowling quietly along a by-road on the opposite side of the water from Hurley. And in a secret place, they came on a wicked old gentleman, breaking the laws of his country, and catching perch in close time, out of a punt, with a chair, and a stone bottle, and a fisherman from Maidenhead, who shall be nameless, but who must consider himself cautioned.

The Rajah of Ahmednuggur lives close by there;

and he was reading the *Times*, when Charles asked the coachman to pull up, that he might see the sport. The Rajah's attention was caught by seeing the carriage stop; and he looked through a double-barrelled opera glass, and not only saw Charles and William in the carriage, but saw, through the osiers, the hoary old profligate with his paternoster pulling the perch out as fast as he could put his line in. Fired by a virtuous indignation (I wish every gentleman on the Thames would do likewise), he ran in his breeches and slippers down the lawn, and began blowing up like Old Gooseberry.

The old gentleman who was fishing looked at the rajah's red-brick house, and said, "If my face was as ugly as that house, I would wear a green veil;" but he ordered the fisherman to take up the rypecks, and he floated away down stream.

And as Charles and William drove along, Charles said, "My dear boy, there could not be any harm in catching a few roach. I should so like to go about among pleasant places in a punt once more."

When they got home, the head keeper was sent for. Charles told him that he would so much like to go fishing, and that a few roach would not make much difference. The keeper scornfully declined arguing about the matter, but only wanted to know what time

Mr. Ravenshoe would like to go, adding that any one who made objections would be brought up uncommon short.

So William and he went fishing in a punt, and one day Charles said, "I don't care about this punt-fishing much. I wish—I wish I could get back to the trout at Ravenshoe."

"Do you really mean that?" said William.

"Ah, Willy!" said Charles. "If I could only see it again!"

"How I have been waiting to hear you say that!" said William. "Come to your home with me; why, the people are wondering where we are. My darling bird will be jealous, if I stay here much longer. Come down to my wedding."

"When are you to be married, William?"

"On the same day as yourself," said William sturdily.

Said Charles, "Put the punt ashore, will you?" And they did. And Charles, with his nose in the air, and his chest out, walked beside William across the spring meadows, through the lengthening grass, through the calthas, and the orchises, and the ladies' slippers, and the cowslips, and the fritillaries, through the budding flower garden which one finds in spring among the English meadows, a hale strong man. And when they had clomb the precipitous slope of the deer-park,

Charles picked a rhododendron flower, and put it in his button-hole, and turned round to William, with the flush of health on his face, and said—

"Brother, we will go to Ravenshoe, and you will be with your love. Shall we be married in London?"

"In St. Petersburgh, if you like, now I see you looking your old self again. But why?"

"A fancy of mine. When I remember what I went through in London through my own obstinacy, I should like to take my revenge on the place, by spending the happiest day of my life there. Do you agree?"

"Of course."

"Ask Lady Ascot and Mary and the children down to Ravenshoe. Lady Hainault will come too, but he can't. And have General Mainwaring and the Tiernays. Have as many of the old circle as we can get."

"This is something like life again," said William. "Remember, Charles, I am not spending the revenues of Ravenshoe. They are yours. I know it. I am spending about 400*l.* a year. When our grandfather's marriage is proved, you will provide for me and my wife, I know that. Be quiet. But we shall never prove that till we find Ellen."

"Find Ellen!" exclaimed Charles, turning round. "I will not go near Ellen yet."

"Do you know where she is?" asked William, eagerly.

"Of course I do." said Charles. "She is at Hackney. Hornby told me so when he was dying. But let her be for a time."

"I tell you," said William, "that I am sure that she knows everything. At Hackney!"

The allied powers, General Mainwaring, Lady Ascot, Lord Hainault, and William, were not long before they searched every hole and corner of Hackney, in and out. There was only one nunnery there, but, in that nunnery, there was no young lady at all resembling Ellen. The priests, particularly Father Mackworth's friend Butler, gave them every assistance in their power. But it was no good.

As Charles and William were in the railway carriage going westward, Charles said—

"Well, we have failed to find Ellen. Mackworth, poor fellow, is still at Ravenshoe."

"Yes," said William, "and nearly idiotic. All his fine-spun cobwebs cast to the winds. But he holds the clue to this mystery, or I am mistaken. The younger Tiernay takes care of him. He probably won't know you. But Charles, when you come into Ravenshoe, keep a corner for Mackworth."

"He ought to be an honoured guest of the house as long as he lives," said Charles. "You still persist in saying that Ravenshoe is mine."

"I am sure it is," said William.

And, at this same time, William wrote to two other people telling all about the state of affairs, and asking them to come and join the circle. And John Marston came across into my room and said, "Let us go." And I said, "My dear John, we ought to go. It is not every day that we see a man, and such a man, risen from the dead, as Charles Ravenshoe."

And so we went.

CHAPTER XVI.

FATHER MACKWORTH PUTS THE FINISHING TOUCH ON HIS GREAT PIECE OF EMBROIDERY.

AND so we went. At Ravenshoe were assembled General Mainwaring, Lady Ascot, Mary, Gus, Flora, Archy, and nurse, William, Charles, Father Tiernay and Father Murtagh Tiernay, John Marston, and Tommy Cruse from Clovelly, a little fisherboy, cousin of Jane Evans's—Jane Evans who was to be Mrs. Ravenshoe.

It became necessary that Jane Evans should be presented to Lady Ascot. She was only a fisherman's daughter, but she was wonderfully beautiful, and gentle, and good. William brought her into the hall one evening, when every one was sitting round the fire; and he said, "My dear madam, this is my wife that is to be." Nothing more.

And the dear old woman rose and kissed her, and said, "My love, how wonderfully pretty you are. You must learn to love me, you know, and you must make

haste about it, because I am a very old woman, and I sha'n't live very long."

So Jane sat down by Mary, and was at home, though a little nervous. And General Mainwaring came and sat beside her, and made himself as agreeable as very few men beside him know how to. And the fisherboy got next to William, and stared about with his great black eyes, like a deer in a flower-garden. (You caught that face capitally, Mr. Hook, if you will allow me to say so—best painter of the day!)

Jane Evans was an immense success. She had been to school six months at Exeter, and had possibly been drilled in a few little matters: such as how to ask a gentleman to hold her fan; how to sit down to the piano when asked to sing (which she couldn't do); how to marshal her company to dinner; how to step into the car of a balloon; and so on. Things absolutely necessary to know, of course, but which had nothing to do with her success in this case; for she was so beautiful, gentle, and winning, that she might have done anything short of eating with her knife, and would have been considered nice.

Had she a slight Devonshire accent? Well, well! Do you know, I rather like it. I consider it aqually so good with the Scotch, my dear.

I could linger and linger on about this pleasant

spring at old Ravenshoe, but I must not. You have been my companion so long that I am right loth to part with you. But the end is very near.

Charles had his revenge upon the trout. The first day after he had recovered from his journey, he and William went out and did most terrible things. William would not carry a rod, but gave his to the servant, and took the landing-net. That Ravenshoe stream carries the heaviest fish in Devonshire. Charles worked up to the waterfall, and got nineteen, weighing fourteen pounds. Then they walked down to the weir above the bridge, and then Charles' evil genius prompted him to say, "William, have you got a salmon fly in your book?" And William told him that he had, but solemnly warned him of what would happen.

Charles was reckless and foolish. He, with a twelve foot trout rod, and thirty yards of line, threw a small salmon fly under the weir above the bridge. There was a flash on the water. Charles' poor little reel began screaming, and the next moment the line came "flick" home across his face, and he said, "By gosh, what a fool I was," and then he looked up to the bridge, and there was Father Mackworth looking at him.

"How d'ye do, my dear sir?" said Charles. "Glad

to see you out. I have been trying to kill a salmon with trout tackle, and have done quite the other thing."

Father Mackworth looked at him, but did not speak a word. Then he looked round, and young Murtagh Tiernay came up and led him away; and Charles got up on the road and watched the pair going home. And as he saw the tall narrow figure of Father Mackworth creeping slowly along, dragging his heels as he went, he said, "Poor old fellow, I hope he will live to forgive me."

Father Mackworth, poor fellow, dragged his heels homeward; and when he got into his room in the priests' tower, Murtagh Tiernay said to him, "My dear friend, you are not angry with me? I did not tell you that he was come back, I thought it would agitate you."

And Father Mackworth said slowly, for all his old decisive utterance was gone, "The Virgin bless you, you are a good man."

And Father Mackworth spoke truth. Both the Tiernays were good fellows, though papists.

"Let me help you off with your coat," said Murtagh, for Mackworth was standing in deep thought.

"Thank you," said Mackworth. "Now, while I sit here, go and fetch your brother."

Murtagh Tiernay did as he was told. In a few

minutes our good jolly old Irish friend was leaning over Mackworth's chair.

"Ye're not angry that we didn't tell ye there was company?" he said.

"No, no," said Mackworth. "Don't speak to me, that's a good man. Don't confuse me. I am going. You had better send Murtagh out of the room."

Father Murtagh disappeared.

"I am going," said Mackworth. "Tiernay, we were not always good friends, were we?"

"We are good friends, any way now, brother," said Tiernay.

"Ay, ay, you are a good man. I have done a wrong. I did it for the sake of the Church, partly, and partly —well. I was very fond of Cuthbert. I loved that boy, Tiernay. And I spun a web. But it has all got confused. It is on this left side, which feels so heavy. They shouldn't make one's brain in two halves, should they?"

"Begorra no. It's a burnin' shame," said Father Tiernay, determining, like a true Irishman, to agree with every word said, and find out what was coming.

"That being the case, my dear friend," said poor Mackworth, "give me the portfolio and ink, and we will let our dear brother Butler know, *de profundis clamavi*, that the time is come."

Father Tiernay said, "That will be the proper course," and got him pen and ink, fully assured that another fit was coming on, and that he was wandering in his mind; but still watching to see whether he would let out anything. A true Irishman.

Mackworth let out nothing. He wrote as steadily as he could, a letter of two lines, and put it in an envelope. Then he wrote another letter of about three lines, and inclosed the whole in a larger envelope, and closed it. Then he said to Father Tiernay, "Direct it to Butler, will you, my dear friend; you quite agree that I have done right?"

Father Tiernay said that he had done quite right; but wondered what the dickens it was all about. We soon found out. But we walked, and rode, and fished, and chatted, and played billiards, and got up charades with Lady Ascot for an audience; not often thinking of the poor paralytic priest in the lonely tower, and little dreaming of the mine which he was going to spring under our feet.

The rows (there is no other expression) that used to go on between Father Tiernay and Lady Ascot were as amusing as anything I ever heard. I must do Tiernay the justice to say that he was always perfectly well bred, and also, that Lady Ascot began it. Her good temper, her humour, and her shrewdness were like herself; I can

say no more. Tiernay dodged, and shuffled, and went from pillar to post, and was as witty and good-humoured as an Irishman can be; but I, as a staunch Protestant, am of opinion that Lady Ascot, though nearly ninety, had the best of it. I daresay good Father Tiernay don't agree with me.

The younger Tiernay was always in close attendance on Mackworth. Every one got very fond of this young priest. We used to wait until Father Mackworth was reported to be in bed, and then he was sent for. And generally we used to make an excuse to go into the chapel, and Lady Ascot would come, defiant of rheumatism, and we would get him to the organ.

And then—Oh, Lord! how he would make that organ speak, and plead, and pray, till the prayer was won. And then, how he would send aggregated armies of notes, marching in vast battalions one after another, out into space, to die in confused melody; and then, how he would sound the trumpet to recal them, and get no answer but the echo of the roof. Ah! well. I hope you are fond of music, reader.

But one night we sent for him, and he could not come. And later we sent again, but he did not come; and the man we had sent, being asked, looked uneasy, and said he did not know why. By this time the ladies had gone to bed. General Mainwaring, Charles, William,

John Marston, and myself, were sitting over the fire in the hall, smoking, and little Tommy Cruse was standing between William's knees.

The candles and the fire were low. There was light outside from a clouded moon, so that one could see the gleam of the sea out of the mullioned windows. Charles was stooping down, describing the battle of the Alma on the hearthrug, and William was bending over, watching him, holding the boy between his knees, as I said. General Mainwaring was puffing his cigar, and saying, "Yes, yes; that's right enough;" and Marston and I were, like William, looking at Charles.

Suddenly the boy gave a loud cry, and hid his face in William's bosom. I thought he had been taken with a fit. I looked up over General Mainwaring's head, and I cried out, "My God! what is this?"

We were all on our legs in a moment, looking the same way. At the long low mullioned window which had been behind General Mainwaring. The clouded moonlight outside showed us the shape of it. But between us and it there stood three black figures, and as we looked at them, we drew one towards the other, for we were frightened. The general took two steps forward.

One of the figures advanced noiselessly. It was dressed in black, and its face was shrouded in a black

hood. In that light, with that silent even way of approaching, it was the most awful figure I ever saw. And from under its hood came a woman's voice, the sound of which made the blood of more than one to stand still, and then go madly on again. It said:—

"I am Ellen Ravenshoe. My sins and my repentance are known to some here. I have been to the war, in the hospitals, till my health gave way, and I came home but yesterday, as it were, and I have been summoned here. Charles, I was beautiful once. Look at this."

And she threw her hood back, and we looked at her in the dim light. Beautiful once! Ay, but never so beautiful as now. The complexion was deadly pale, and the features were pinched, but she was more beautiful than ever. I declare I believe that if we had seen a ring of glory round her head at that moment none of us would have been surprised. Just then, her beauty, her nun's dress, and the darkness of the hall, assisted the illusion, probably; but there was really something saint-like and romantic about her, for an instant or so, which made us all stand silent. Alas! there was no ring of glory round her head. Poor Ellen was only bearing the cross, she had not won the crown.

Charles was the first who spoke or moved; he went up to her, and kissed her, and said, "My sweet sister, I

knew that if I ever saw you again I should see you in these weeds. My dear love, I am so glad to see you. And oh, my sister, how much more happy to see you dressed like that—"

(Of course he did not use exactly those words, but words to that effect, only more passionate and even less grammatical. I am not a short-hand writer. I only give you the substance of conversations in the best prose I can command.)

"Charles," she said, "I do right to wear weeds, for I am the widow of—(Never mind what she said; that sort of thing very properly jars on Protestant ears.) I am a sister of the Society of Mercy of St. Bridget, and I have been to the East, as I told you: and more than once I must have been into the room where you lay, to borrow things, or talk with English Catholic ladies, and never guessed you were there. After Hornby had found me at Hackney, I got leave from Father Butler to join an Irish sisterhood; for our mother was Irish in speech and in heart, you remember, though not by birth. I have something to say—something very important. Father Mackworth, will you come here? Are all here intimate friends of the family? Will you ask any of them to leave the hall, Charles?"

"Not one," said Charles. "Is one of those dark figures which have frightened us so much, Father Mack-

worth? My dear sir, I am so sorry. Come to the fire; and who is the other?"

"Only Murtagh Tiernay," said a soft voice.

"Why did you stand out there these few minutes? Father Mackworth, your arm."

William and Charles helped him in towards the fire. He looked terribly ill and ghastly. The dear old general took him from them, and sat him down in his own chair by the fire; and there he sat looking curiously around him, with the light of the wood fire and the candles strong on his face, while Ellen stood behind him, with her hood thrown back, and her white hands folded on her bosom. If you have ever seen a stranger group than we were, I should be glad to hear of it.

Poor Mackworth seemed to think that it was expected of him to speak. He looked up to General Mainwaring, and he said—

"I hope you are the better of your wound, sir. I have had a sharp stroke of paralysis, and I have another coming on, sir, and my memory is going. When you meet my Lord Saltire, whom I am surprised to find absent .to-night, will you tell him that I presented my compliments, and thought that he had used me very well on the whole. Had she not better begin, sir? or it may be too late; unless you would like to wait for Lord Saltire."

Father Murtagh Tiernay knelt down and whispered to him.

"Ay! ay!" he said, "Dead—ay! so he is, I had forgotten. We shall all be dead soon. Some of us will to hell, General, and some to heaven, and all to purgatory. I am a priest, sir. I have been bound body and soul to the Church from a child, and I have done things which the Church will disapprove of when they are told, though not while they are kept secret; and I tell them because the eyes of a dead man, of a man who was drowned bathing in the bay, haunt me day and night, and say, speak out!—Murtagh!"

Little Tiernay was kneeling beside him, and called his attention to him.

"You had better give me the wine; for the end is getting very near. Tell her to begin."

And while poor Mackworth was taking some wine (poor fellow, it was little enough he had taken in his life-time), Ellen began to speak. I had some notion that we should know everything now. We had guessed the truth for a long while. We had guessed everything about Petre Ravenshoe's marriage. We believed in it. We seemed to know all about it, from Lady Ascot. No link was wanting in the chain of proof, save one, the name of the place in which that marriage took place. That had puzzled every one. Lady Ascot declared it

was a place in the north of Hampshire, as you will remember, but every register had been searched there, without result. So conceive how we all stared at poor Ellen, when she began to speak, wondering whether she knew as much as ourselves, or even more.

"I am Miss Ravenshoe," she said quietly. "My brother Charles there is heir to this estate; and I have come here to-night to tell you so."

There was nothing new here. We knew all about that. I stood up and put my arm through Charles Ravenshoe's, and William came and laid his hand upon my shoulder. The general stood before the fire, and Ellen went on.

"Petre Ravenshoe was married in 1778 to Maria Dawson, and his son was James Ravenshoe, my father, who was called Horton, and was Densil Ravenshoe's gamekeeper. I have proof of this."

So had we. We knew all this. What did she know more? It was intolerable that she was to stop just here, and leave the one awful point unanswered. I forgot my good manners utterly; I clutched Charles's arm tighter, and I cried out—

"We know about the marriage, Miss Ravenshoe; we have known of it a long while. But where did it take place, my dear young lady? Where?"

She turned on me and answered, wondering at my

eagerness. *I* had brought out the decisive words at last, the words that we had been dying to hear for six months; she said—

"At Finchampstead, in Berkshire; I have a copy of the certificate with me."

I let go of Charles's arm, and fell back in my chair. My connexion with this story is over (except the trouble of telling it, which I beg you won't mention, for it has given me as much pleasure as it has you; and that, if you look at it in a proper point of view, is quite just, for very few men have a friend who has met with such adventures as Charles Ravenshoe, who will tell them all about it afterwards). I fell back in my chair, and stared at poor Father Mackworth as if he were a copper disk, and I was trying to get into a sufficiently idiotic state to be electrobiologized.

"I have very little more to tell," said Ellen. "I was not aware that you knew so much. From Mr. William Marston's agitation, I conclude that I have supplied the only link which was missing. I think that Father Mackworth wishes to explain to you why he sent for me to come here to-night. If he feels himself able to do so now, I shall be glad to be dismissed."

Father Mackworth sat up in his chair, and spoke at once. He had gathered himself up for the effort, and

went through it well, though with halting and difficult speech.

"I knew of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage from Father Clifford, with all the particulars. It had been confessed to him. He told it to me the day Mrs. Ravenshoe died, after Densil Ravenshoe had told me that his second son was to be brought up to the Protestant faith. I went to him in a furious passion, and he told me about this previous marriage which had been confessed to him, to quiet me. It showed me, that if the worst were to happen, and Cuthbert were to die, and Ravenshoe go to a Protestant, I could still bring in a Catholic as a last resource. For if Cuthbert had died, and Norah had not confessed about the changing of the children, I should have brought in James, and after him William, both Catholics, believing him to be the son of James and Norah. Do you understand?

"Why did I not? I loved that boy Cuthbert. And it was told under seal of confession, and must not be used save in deadly extremity, and William was a turbulent boy. Which would have been the greater crime at that time? It was only a choice of evils, for the Church is very dear to me.

"Then Norah confessed to me about the change of children, and then I saw, that by speaking of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage, I should only bring in a Pro-

testant heir. But I saw, also, that by using her confession only, I could prove Charles Ravenshoe to be merely a gamekeeper's son, and turn him out into the world, and so I used it, sir. You used to irritate and insult me, sir," he said, turning to Charles, "and I was not so near death then as now. If you can forgive me, in God's name say so."

Charles went over to him, and put his arm round him. "Forgive you?" he said; "dear Mackworth, can you forgive me?"

"Well, well!" he continued, "what have I to forgive, Charles? At one time, I thought if I spoke that it would be better, because Ellen, the only daughter of the house, would have had a great dower, as Ravenshoe girls have. But I loved Cuthbert too well. And Lord Welter stopped my even thinking of doing so, by coming to Ravenshoe. And—and—we are all gentlemen here. The day that you hunted the black hare, I had been scolding her for writing to him. And William and I made her mad between us, and she ran away to him. And she is with the army now, Charles. I should not fetch her back, Charles. She is doing very good work there."

By this time she had drawn the black hood over her face, and was standing behind him, motionless.

"I will answer any more questions you like to-

morrow. Petre Ravenshoe's marriage took place at Finchampstead, remember. Charles, my dear boy, would you mind kissing me? I think I always loved you, Charles. Murtagh Tiernay, take me to my room."

And so he went tottering away through the darkness. Charles opened the door for him. Ellen stood with her hood over her face, motionless.

"I can speak like this with my face hidden," she said. "It is easy for one who has been through what I have, to speak. What I have been you know, what I am now is—(she used one of those Roman Catholic forms of expression, which are best not repeated too often). I have a little to add to this statement. William was cruel to me. You know you were. You were wrong. I will not go on. You were awfully unjust—you were horribly unjust. The man who has just left the room had some slight right to upbraid me. You had none. You were utterly wrong. Mackworth, in one way, is a very high-minded honourable man. You made me hate you, William. God forgive me. I have forgiven you now."

"Yes; I was wrong," said William, "I was wrong. But Ellen, Ellen! before old friends, only with regard to the person."

"When you treated me so ill, I was as innocent as your mother, sir. Let us go on. This man Mackworth

knew more than you. We had some terrible scenes together about Lord Welter. One day he lost his temper, and became theatrical. He opened his desk and showed me a bundle of papers, which he waved in the air, and said that they contained my future destiny. The next day, I went to the carpenter's shop and took a chisel. I broke open his desk, and possessed myself of them. I found the certificate of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage. I knew that you, William, as I thought, and I were the elder children. But I loved Cuthbert and Charles better than you or myself, and I would not speak. When, afterwards, Father Butler told me, while I was with Lord Welter, before I joined the sisters, of the astounding fact of the change of children, I still held my peace, because I thought Charles would be the better of penance for a year or so, and because I hesitated to throw the power of a house like this into heretic hands, though it were into the hands of my own brother. Mackworth and Butler were to some extent enemies, I think; for Butler seems not to have told Mackworth that I was with him for some time, and I hardly know how he found it out at last. Three days ago I received this letter from Mackworth, and after some hesitation I came. For I thought that the Church could not be helped by wrong, and I wanted to see that he concealed nothing. Here it is. I shall say no more."

And she departed, and I have not seen her since. Perhaps she is best where she is. I got a sight of the letter from Father Mackworth. It ran thus—

"Come here at once, I order you. I am going to tell the truth. Charles has come back. I will not bear the responsibility any longer."

Poor Mackworth! He went back to his room, attended by the kind-hearted young priest, who had left his beloved organ at Segur, to come and attend to him. Lord Segur pished and pshawed, and did something more, which we won't talk about, for which he had to get absolution. But Murtagh Tiernay stayed at Ravenshoe, defying his lordship, and his lordship's profane oaths, and making the Ravenshoe organ talk to Father Mackworth about quiet churchyards and silent cloisters; and sometimes raging on until the poor paralytic priest began to see the great gates rolled back, and the street of the everlasting city beyond, crowded with glorious angels. Let us leave these two to their music. Before we went to town for the wedding, we were sitting one night, and playing at loo, in the hall. (Not guinea unlimited loo, as they used to play at Lord Welter's, but penny loo, limited to eighteen pence.) General Mainwaring had been looed in miss four times running, making six shillings (an almost impossible circumstance, but true), and Lady Ascot had been laughing

at him so, that she had to take off her spectacles and wipe them, when Murtagh Tiernay came into the hall, and took away Charles, and his brother Father Tiernay.

The game was dropped soon after this. At Ravenshoe there was an old-fashioned custom of having a great supper brought into the hall at ten. A silly old custom, seeing that every one had dined at seven. Supper was brought in, and every one sat down to table. All sorts of things were handed to one by the servants, but no one ate anything. No one ever did. But the head of the table was empty, Charles was absent.

After supper was cleared away, every one drew in a great circle round the fire, in the charming old-fashioned way one sees very seldom now, for a talk before we went to bed. But nobody talked much. Only Lady Ascot said, "I shall not go upstairs till he comes back. General, you may smoke your cigar, but here I sit."

General Mainwaring would not smoke his cigar, even up the chimney. Almost before he had time to say so, Charles and Father Tiernay came into the room without saying a word, and Charles, passing through the circle, pushed the logs on the hearth together with his foot.

"Charles," said Lady Ascot, "has anything happened?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, aunt."

"I thought so," said Lady Ascot, "I hope he has forgiven me any hard thoughts I had of him. I could have been brought to love that man in time. There were a great many worse men than he, sir," she added in her old clear ringing tones, turning to Father Tiernay. "There were a great many worse men than he."

"There were a great many worse men, Lady Ascot," said Father Tiernay. "There have been many worse men with better opportunities. He was a good man brought up in a bad school. A good man spoilt. General Mainwaring, you who are probably more honoured than any man in England just now, and are worthy of it; you who can't stop at a street corner without a crowd getting together to hurrah to you; you, the very darling of the nation, are going to Oxford to be made an honorary Doctor of Laws. And when you go into that theatre, and hear the maddening music of those boys' voices cheering you: then, general, don't get insane with pride like Herod, but think what you might have been with Mackworth's opportunities."

I think we all respected the Irishman for speaking up for his friend, although his speech might be extravagant. But I am sure that no one respected him more sincerely than our valiant, humble, old friend, General Mainwaring.

CHAPTER XVII.

GUS AND FLORA ARE NAUGHTY IN CHURCH, AND THE WHOLE BUSINESS COMES TO AN END.

CHARLES' purpose of being married in London held good. And I need not say that William's held good too.

Shall I insult your judgment by telling you that the whole story of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage at Finchampstead was true? I think not. The register was found, the lawyers were busy down at Ravenshoe, for every one was anxious to get up to London, and have the two marriages over before the season was too far advanced.

The memorabilia about this time at Ravenshoe, were —The weather was glorious. (I am not going to give you any more about the two capes, and that sort of thing. You have had those two capes often enough. And I am reserving my twenty-ninth description of the Ravenshoe scenery for the concluding chapter.) The weather, I say, was glorious. And I was always being fetched in from the river, smelling fishy, and being made

to witness deeds. I got tired of writing my name. I may have signed away the amount of the national debt in triplicate, for anything I know (or care. For you can't get blood out of a stone). I signed some fifty of them, I think. But I signed two, which gave me great pleasure.

The first was a rent-charge on Ravenshoe of two thousand a year, in favour of William Ravenshoe. The second was a similar deed of five hundred a year in favour of Miss Ravenshoe. We will now have done with all this sordid business, and go on.

The ladies had all left for town, to prepare for the ceremony. There was a bachelors' house at Ravenshoe for the last time. The weather was hot. Charles Ravenshoe, General Mainwaring, and the rest, were all looking out of the dining-room windows towards the sea, when we were astonished by seeing two people ride up on to the terrace, and stop before the porch.

A noble-looking old gentleman, in a blue coat and brass buttons, knee-breeches and gaiters, on a cob, and a beautiful boy of sixteen on a horse. *I* knew well enough who it was, and I said Ho! But the others wondered. William would have known, had he been looking out of window just then, but by the time he got there, the old gentleman and the boy were in the porch, and two of Charles's men were walking the horses up and down.

"Now, who the deuce is this?" said Charles. "They haven't come far; but I don't know them. I seem to know the old man, somehow; but I can't remember."

We heard the old gentleman's heavy step along the hall, and then the door was thrown open, and the butler announced, like a true Devonshire man—

"Mr. Humby to Hele!"

The old gentleman advanced with a frank smile and took Charles's hand, and said, "Welcome home, sir; welcome to your own; welcome to Ravenshoe. A Protestant at Ravenshoe at last. After so many centuries."

Everybody had grown limp and faint when they heard the awful name of Humby, that is to say, every one but me. Of course I had nothing to do with fetching him over. Not at all. This was the first time that a Humby had had friendly communication with a Ravenshoe, for seven hundred and eighty-nine years. The two families had quarrelled in 1066, in consequence of John Humby having pushed against Kempion Ravenshoe, in the grand rush across the Senlac, at the battle of Hastings. Kempion Ravenshoe had asked John Humby where he was shoving to, and John Humby had expressed a wish to punch Kempion Ravenshoe's head (or do what went for the same thing in those times. I am no antiquarian). The wound was never healed. The two families located themselves on adjoining estates, in

Devonshire immediately after the conquest, but never spoke till 1529, when Lionel Humby bit his thumb at our old friend, Alured Ravenshoe, in Cardinal Wolsey's antechamber, at Hampton, and Alured Ravenshoe asked him, what the devil he meant by that. They fought in Twickenham meadow, but held no relations for two hundred and fourteen years, that is to say, till 1745, when Ambrose Ravenshoe squeezed an orange at Chichester Humby at an election dinner in Stonnington, and Boddy Fortescue went out as second to Chichester Humby, and Lord Segur to Ambrose Ravenshoe. After this the families did not speak again for one hundred and ten years, that is to say, till the time we are speaking of, the end of April, 1855, when James Humby to Hele frightened us all out of our wits, by coming into the dining-room at Ravenshoe, in a blue coat and brass buttons, and shaking hands with Charles, and saying, beside what I have written above—

"Mrs. Humby and my daughters are in London for the season, and I go to join them the day after to-morrow. There has been a slight cloud between the two houses lately" (that is to say, as we know it, for seven hundred and eighty-nine years. But what is time?) "and I wish to remove it. I am not a very old man, but I have my whimsies, my dear sir. I wish my daughters to appear among Miss Corby's bridesmaids,

and do you know, I fancy when you get to London, that you will find the whole matter arranged."

Who was to resist this? Old Humby went up in the train with all of us the next day but one. And if I were asked to pick out the most roystering, boisterous, jolly old county member in England, Scotland, or Ireland, I should pick out old Humby of Hele. What fun he made at the stations where the express stopped! The way he allowed himself to be fetched out of the refreshment room by the guard, and then, at the last moment, engaged him in a general conversation about the administration of the line, until the station-master was mad, and an accident imminent, was worthy of a much younger man, to say the least. But then, in a blue coat and brass buttons, with drab small clothes, you may do anything. They are sure to take you for a swell. If I, William Marston, am ever old enough, and fat enough, and rich enough, I shall dress like that myself, for reasons. If my figure does not develop, I shall try black br—ch—s and gaiters, with a shovel hat, and a black silk waistcoat buttoned up under my throat. That very often succeeds. Either are better than pegtops and a black bowler hat, which strike no awe into the beholders.

When we all got to town, we were, of course, very busy. There was a great deal of millinery business.

Old Humby insisted on helping at it. One day he went to Madame Tulle's, in Conduit Street, with his wife and two daughters, and asked me to come too, for which I was sorry at first, for he behaved very badly, and made a great noise. We were in a great suite of rooms on the first floor, full of crinolines and that sort of thing, and there were a great many people present. I was trying to keep him quiet, for he was cutting a good many clumsy jokes, as an old-fashioned country squire will. Everybody was amused with him, and thoroughly appreciated his fun, save his own wife and daughters, who were annoyed; so I was trying to keep him quiet, when a tall, brown-faced, handsome young man came up to me and said—

"I beg a thousand pardons; but is not your name Marston?"

I said, "Yes."

"You are a first cousin of John Marston, are you not?—of John Marston, whom I used to meet at Casterton?"

I said, "Yes; that John Marston was my cousin." But I couldn't remember my man, for all that.

"You don't remember me! I met you once at old Captain Archer's, at Lashbrook, for ten minutes. My wife has come here to buy fal-lals for Charles Ravenshoe's wedding. He is going to marry my cousin. My

name is George Corby. I have married Miss Ellen Blockstrop, daughter of Admiral Blockstrop. Her eldest sister married young Captain Archer of the merchant service."

I felt very faint, but I congratulated him. The way those Australians do business shames us old-country folk. To get over a heavy disappointment and be married in two months and a week is very creditable.

"We bushmen are rough fellows," he said. (His manners were really charming. I never saw them beaten.) "But you old-country fellows must excuse us. Will you give me the pleasure of your acquaintance? I am sure you must be a good fellow, for your cousin is one of the best fellows I ever knew."

"I should be delighted." And I spoke the truth.

"I will introduce you to my wife directly," he said; "but the fact is, she is just now having a row with Madame Tulle, the milliner here. My wife is a deuced economical woman, and she wants to show at the Ravenshoe wedding in a white moiré-antique, which will only cost fifty guineas, and which she says will do for an evening dress in Australia afterwards. And the Frenchwoman won't let her have it for the purpose, because she says it is incorrect. And I hope to Gad the Frenchwoman will win, because my wife will get quite as good a gown to look at for twenty guineas or so."

Squire Humby begged to be introduced. Which I did.

"I am glad, sir," he said, "that my daughters have not heard your conversation. It would have demoralised them, sir, for the rest of their lives. I hope they have not heard the argument about the fifty-guinea gown. If they have, I am a ruined man. It was one of you Australians who gave twelve hundred guineas for the bull 'Master Butterfly,' the day before yesterday?"

"Well, yes," said George Corby, "I bought the bull. He'll pay, sir, handsomely, in our part of the world."

"The devil he will," said Squire Humby. "You don't know an opening for a young man of sixty-five, with a blue coat and brass buttons, who understands his business, in your part of the country, do you?"

And so on. The weddings took place at St. Peter's, Eaton Square. If the ghost of the little shoeblack had been hovering round the wall where he had played fives with the brass button, he might have almost heard the ceremony performed. Mary and Charles were not a handsome couple. The enthusiasm of the population was reserved for William and Jane Evans, who certainly were. It is my nature to be a Jack-of-all-trades, and so I was entrusted with old Master Evans, Jane's father, a magnificent old sea-king, whom we have met before. We two preferred to go to church quietly before the others, and he, refusing to go into a pew, found himself

a place in the free seats, and made himself comfortable. So I went out into the porch, and waited till they came.

I waited till the procession had gone in, and then I found that the tail of it was composed of poor Lord Charles Herries' children, Gus, Flora, and Archy, with their nurse.

If a bachelor is worth his salt, he will make himself useful. I saw that nurse was in distress and anxious, so I stayed with her.

Archy was really as good as gold till he met with his accident. He walked up the steps with nurse as quiet as possible. But even at first I began to get anxious about Gus and Flora. They were excited. Gus wouldn't walk up the steps; but he put his two heels together, and jumped up them one at a time, and Flora walked backwards, looking at him sarcastically. At the top step but one Gus stumbled; whereupon Flora said, "Goozlemy, goozlemy, goozlemy."

And Gus said, "You wait a minute, my lady, till we get into church," after which awful speech I felt as if I was smoking in a powder magazine.

I was put into a pew with Gus, and Flora, and Archy. Nurse, in her modesty, went into the pew behind us.

I am sorry to say that these dear children, with

whom I had had no previous acquaintance, were very naughty. The ceremony began by Archy getting too near the edge of his hassock, falling off, pitching against the pew door, bursting it open, and flying out among the free seats, head foremost. Nurse, a nimble and dexterous woman, dashed out, and caught him up, and actually got him out of the church door before he had time to fetch his breath for a scream. Gus and Flora were left alone with me.

Flora had a great scarlet and gold church service. As soon as she opened it, she disconcerted me by saying aloud, to an imaginary female friend, "My dear, there is going to be a collection; and I have left my purse on the piano."

At this time, also, Gus, seeing that the business was well begun, removed to the further end of the pew, sat down on the hassock, and took from his trousers' pocket a large tin trumpet.

I broke out all over in a cold perspiration as I looked at him. He saw my distress, and putting it to his lips, puffed out his cheeks. Flora administered comfort to me. She said, "You are looking at that foolish boy. Perhaps he won't blow it, after all. He mayn't if you don't look at him. At all events, he probably won't blow it till the organ begins; and then it won't matter so much."

Matters were so hopeless with me that I looked at old Master Evans. He had bent down his head on to the rail of the bench before him. His beautiful daughter had been his only companion at home for many years, for his wife had died when Jane was a little bare-legged thing, who paddled in the surf. It had been a rise in life for her to marry Mr. Charles Ravenshoe's favourite pad-groom. And just now she had walked calmly and quietly up the aisle, and had stopped when she came to where he sat, and had pushed the Honiton-lace veil from her forehead, and kissed his dear old cheek: and she would walk back directly as Mrs. William Ravenshoe. And so the noble old privateer skipper had bent down, and there was nothing to be seen there, but a grey head and broad shoulders, which seemed to shake.

And so I looked up to the east end. And I saw the two couples kneeling before the clergyman. And when I, knowing everything as I did, saw Charles kneeling beside Mary Corby, with Lord Ascot, great burly, brutal giant, standing behind him, I said something which is not in the marriage service of the Church of England. After it all, to see him and her kneeling so quietly there together! We were all happy enough that day. But I don't think that any one was much happier than I. For I knew more than any one. And also, three months

from that time, I married my present wife, Eliza Humby. And the affair had only been arranged two days. So I was in good spirits.

At least I should have been, if it had not been for Lord Charles Herries' children. I wish those dear children (not meaning them any harm) had been, to put it mildly, at play on the village green, that blessed day.

When I looked at Gus again, he was still on the hassock, threatening propriety with his trumpet. I hoped for the best. Flora had her prayer-book open, and was playing the piano on each side of it, with her fingers. After a time she looked up at me, and said out loud—

"I suppose you have heard that Archy's cat has kittened?"

I said, "No."

"Oh, yes, it has," she said. "Archy harnessed it to his meal cart, which turns a mill, and plays music when the wheels go round; and it ran downstairs with the cart; and we heard the music playing as it went; and it kittened in the wood-basket immediately afterwards; and Alwright says she don't wonder at it; and no more do I; and the steward's-room boy is going to drown some. But you mustn't tell Archy, because, if you do, he won't say his prayers; and if he don't say his

prayers, he will, &c. &c." Very emphatically, and in a loud tone of voice.

This was very charming. If I could only answer for Gus, and keep Flora busy, it was wildly possible that we might pull through. If I had not been a madman, I should have noticed that Gus had disappeared.

He had. And the pew door had never opened, and I was utterly unconscious. Gus had crawled up, on all fours, under the seat of the pew, until he was opposite the calves of his sister's legs, against which calves, *horresco referens*, he put his trumpet and blew a long shrill blast. Flora behaved very well and courageously. She only gave one long, wild shriek, as from a lunatic in the padded cell in Bedlam, and then, hurling her prayer-book at him, she turned round and tried to kick him in the face.

This was the culminating point of my misfortunes. After this, they behaved better. I represented to them that every one was just coming out of the vestry, and that they had better fight it out in the carriage, going home. Gus only made an impertinent remark about Flora's garters, and Flora only drew a short, but trenchant, historical parallel between Gus and Judas Iscariot; when the brides and bridegrooms came down the aisle, and we all drove off to Charles's house in Eaton Square.

And so, for the first time, I saw altogether, with my

own eyes, the principal characters in this story. Only one was absent. Lord Saltire. I had seen him twice in my life, and once had the honour of a conversation with him. He was a man about five feet eleven, very broad shouldered, and with a very deep chest. As far as the animal part of him went, I came to the conclusion, from close and interested examination for twenty minutes, that he had, fifty or sixty years before, been a man with whom it would have been pleasanter to argue than to box. His make was magnificent. Phrenologically speaking, he had a very high square head, very flat at the sides: and, when I saw him, when he was nearly eighty, he was the handsomest old man I had ever seen. He had a florid, pure complexion. His face was without a wrinkle. His eyebrows were black, and his hair seemed to refuse to be grey. There was as much black as grey in it to the last. His eye was most extraordinary—a deep blue-grey. I can look a man as straight in the face as any one; but when Lord Saltire turned those eyes on me three or four times in the course of our interview, I felt that it was an effort to meet them. I felt that I was in the presence of a man of superior vitality to my own. We were having a talk about matters connected with Charles Ravenshoe, which I have not mentioned, because I want to keep myself, William Marston, as much out of this story as possible. And

whenever this terrible old man looked at me, asking a question, I felt my eyebrows drawing together, and knew that I was looking *defiantly* at him. He was the most extraordinary man I ever met. He never took office after he was forty. He played with politics. He was in heart, I believe (no one knows), an advanced Whig. He chose to call himself Tory. He played the Radical game very deep, early in life, and, I think, he got disgusted with party politics. The last thing the old Radical atheist did in public life was to rally up to the side of the Duke in opposition to the Reform Bill. And another fact about him is, that he had always a strong personal affection for Sir Francis.

He was a man of contradictions, if one judges a man by Whig and Tory rules; but he was a great loss to the public business of the country. He might have done almost anything in public life with his calm clear brain. My cousin John thinks that Lord Barkham's death was the cause of his retirement.

So much about Lord Saltire. Of the other characters mentioned in this story, I will speak at once, just as I saw them sitting round the table at Charles and William Ravenshoe's wedding.

I sat beside Eliza Humby. She was infinitely the most beautiful, clever, and amiable being that the world

ever produced. (But that is my business, not yours.) Charles Ravenshoe sat at the head of the table, and I will leave him alone for a minute. I will give you my impressions of the other characters in this story, as they appeared to me.

Mary was a very charming-looking little person indeed, very short, and with small features. I had never seen her before, and had never heard any one say that she was pretty. I thought her very pretty indeed.

Jane Evans was an exceedingly beautiful Devonshire girl. My eye did not rest very long on her. It came down the table to William, and there it stopped.

I got Eliza Humby to speak to him, and engage him in conversation while I looked at him. I wanted to see whether there was anything remarkable in his face, for a more remarkable instance of disinterested goodwill than his determining to find Charles and ruin himself, I never happened to have heard of.

Well, he was very handsome and pleasing, with a square determined look about the mouth, such as men brought up among horses generally have. But I couldn't understand it, and so I spoke to him across Lizzie, and I said, casting good manners to the winds, "I should think that the only thing you regretted to-day was, that you had not been alongside of Charles at Balaclava;" and then I understood it, for when I mentioned Charles

and Balaclava, I saw for one instant not a groom but a poet. Although, being a respectable and well-conducted man, he has never written any poetry, and probably never will.

Then I looked across the table at Lady Ascot. They say that she was never handsome. I can quite believe that. She was a beautiful old woman certainly, but then all old women are beautiful. Her face was very square, and one could see that it was capable of very violent passion; or could, knowing what one did, guess so. Otherwise there was nothing very remarkable about her, except that she was a remarkably charming old lady. She was talking to General Mainwaring, who was a noble-looking old soldier.

Nothing more. In fact, the whole group were less remarkable and tragical-looking than I thought they would have been. I was disappointed, until I came to Lord Ascot, and then I could not take my eyes off him.

There was tragedy enough there. There was coarse brutality and passion enough, in all conscience. And yet that man had done what he had done. Here was a puzzle with a vengeance.

Lord Ascot, as I saw him now, for the first time, was simply a low-bred and repulsive-looking man. In stature he was gigantic, in every respect save

height. He was about five feet nine, very deep about the chest. His hair was rather dark, cut close. His face was very florid, and perfectly hairless. His forehead was low. His eyes were small, and close together. His eyebrows were heavy, and met over his nose, which was short and square. His mouth was large; and when you came to his mouth, you came to the first tolerable feature in his face. When he was speaking to no one in particular, the under lip was set, and the whole face, I am very sorry to say, was the sort of face which is quite as often seen in the dock, as in the witness-box (unless some gentleman has turned Queen's evidence). And this was the man who had risked a duke's fortune, because "There were some things a fellow couldn't do, you know."

It was very puzzling till he began to speak to his grandmother, and then his lower lip pouted out, his eyebrows raised, his eyes went apart, and he looked a different man. Is it possible that if he had not been brought up to cock-fighting and horse-racing, among prize-fighters and jockeys, that he might have been a different man? I can't say, I am sure.

Lord and Lady Hainault were simply a very high-bred, very handsome, and very charming pair of people. I never had the slightest personal acquaintance with either of them. My cousin knows them both very

intimately, and he says there are not two better people in the world.

Charles Ravenshoe rose to reply to General Mainwaring's speech, proposing the brides and bridegrooms, and I looked at him very curiously. He was pale, from his recent illness, and he never was handsome. But his face was the face of a man, whom I should fancy most people would get very fond of. When we were schoolfellows at Shrewsbury, he was a tall dark-haired boy, who was always laughing, and kicking up a row, and giving his things away to other fellows. Now he was a tall, dark, melancholy-looking man, with great eyes, and lofty eyebrows. His vivacity, and that carriage which comes from the possession of great physical strength, were gone; and while I looked at him, I felt ten years older. Why should I try to describe him further? He is not so remarkable a man as either Lord Ascot or William. But he was the best man I ever knew.

He said a few kind hearty words and sat down, and then Lord Ascot got up. And I took hold of Lizzie's hand with my left; and I put my right elbow on the table and watched him intensely, with my hand shading my face. He had a coat buttoned over his great chest, and as he spoke he kept on buttoning and unbuttoning it with his great coarse hand. He said—

"I ain't much hand at this sort of thing. I suppose those two Marstons, confound them, are saying to themselves that I ought to be, because I am in the House of Lords. That John Marston is a most impudent beggar, and I shall expect to see his friend to-morrow morning. He always was, you know. He has thwarted me all through my life. I wanted Charles Ravenshoe to go to the deuce, and I'll be hanged if he'd let him. And it is not to be borne."

There was a general laugh at this, and Lord Ascot stretched his hand across General Mainwaring, and shook hands with my cousin.

"You men just go out of the room, will you?" (the servants departed, and Lord Ascot went to the door to see they were not listening. I thought some revelation was coming, but I was mistaken). "You see I am obliged to notice strangers, because a fellow may say things among old friends which he don't exactly care to before servants.

"It is all very well to say I'm a fool. That is very likely, and may be taken for granted. But I am not such a fool as not to know that a very strong prejudice exists against me in the present society."

Every one cried out, "No! no!" Of all the great wedding breakfasts that season, this was certainly the

most remarkable. Lord Ascot went on. He was getting the savage look on his face now.

"Well, well! let that pass. Look at that man at the head of the table—the bridegroom. Look at him. You wonder that I did what I did. I'll tell you why. I love that fellow. He is what I call a man, General Mainwaring. I met that fellow at Twyford years ago, and he has always been the same to me since. You say I served him badly once. That is true enough. You insulted me once in public about it, Hainault. You were quite right. Say you, I should not talk about it to-day. But when we come to think how near death's gates some of us have been since then, you will allow that this wedding-day has something very solemn about it.

"My poor wife has broken her back across that infernal gate, and so she could not come. I must ask you all to think kindly of that wife of mine. You have all been very kind to her since her awful accident. She has asked me to thank you.

"I rose to propose a toast, and I have been carried away by a personal statement, which, at every other wedding breakfast I ever heard of, it would be a breach of good manners to make. It is not so on this occasion. Terrible things have befallen every one of us here present. And I suppose we must try

all of us to—hey!—to—hah!—well, to do better in future.

"I rose, I said, to propose a toast. I rose to propose the most blameless and excellent woman I ever knew. I propose that we drink the health of my grandmother, Lady Ascot."

And oh! but we leapt to our feet and drank it. Manners to the winds, after what we had gone through. There was that solemn creature, Lord Hainault, with his champagne glass in his hand, behaving like a schoolboy, and giving us the time. And then, when her dear grey head was bent down over the table, buried in her hands, my present father-in-law, Squire Humby, leapt to his feet like a young giant, and called out for three times three for Lord Ascot. And we had breath enough left to do that handsomely, I warrant you. The whole thing was incorrect in the highest degree, but we did it. And I don't know that any of us were ashamed of it afterwards.

And while the carriages were getting ready, Charles said, would we walk across the square. And we all came with him. And he took us to a piece of dead white wall, at the east-end of St. Peter's Church, opposite the cab-stand. And then he told us the story of the little shoeblack, and how his comical friendship

for that boy had saved him from what it would not do to talk about.

* * * *

But there is a cloud on Charles Ravenshoe's face even now. I saw him last summer lying on the sand, and playing with his eldest boy. And the cloud was on him then. There was no moroseness, no hardness in the expression; but the face was not the merry old face I knew so well at Shrewsbury and Oxford. There is a dull, settled, dreaming melancholy there still. The memory of those few terrible months has cast its shadow upon him. And the shadow will lie, I fancy, upon that forehead, and will dim those eyes, until the forehead is smoothed in the sleep of death, and the eyes have opened to look upon eternity.

Good-bye.

THE END.

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